BANDAR-LOG

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By

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BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1930

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Published October, 1930

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS BOOKS
ARE PUBLISHED BY
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

Colonel Miles Cross lay in a long chair in the shade of the wide verandah of his bungalow at Islamabad. It was May 1857, and although it was hardly ten o'clock the sun was already hot. It beat mercilessly on to the big white plastered house with its low thatched roof, heavy pillars, and wide verandah standing in an expanse of dusty compound. Islamabad, on the borders of the Nizam's dominions, was a small station containing no more than one regiment of native infantry, one or two civil officers, and a doctor. The regiment, the Fortieth Surat Fusiliers, commanded by Colonel Cross, had been stationed in Islamabad for ten years, ever since the Sikh war, their first and only chance of active service. In this war they played an inglorious part.

There had been talk of disbanding the regiment. It happened, however, that Colonel Cross's predecessor died suddenly — it was said by the regimental surgeon of a broken heart, although actually the symptoms were those of cirrhosis of the liver. His death, combined with the magnificent spectacle of the regiment on parade, prevailed on the authorities to rescind the order. There was no doubt that their turnout, in red coatees, spotless white trousers, fusilier caps, and pipeclayed cross belts and pouches, was unusually fine.

They were sent to Islamabad, where they were apparently forgotten and where they were still stationed nine years later in May 1857.

Forty-five years in India had not improved Colonel Cross's habit or his manners. He had become thick in the neck, red in the face, and, with the years, increasingly stout. His liver gave him constant trouble, and he suffered from twinges of the gout. Two years before in a fit of temper he had had an apoplexy, but had recovered. This had given him such a fright that he had been sober for a month, but eventually the effect had worn off. It was only while he lay awake at night, as he did more and more often, that he made resolutions for cutting down his allowance of brandy, for saving money, for giving up India and going to live in retirement at home.

But how could he? He was deep in debt — he had never made anything beyond his pay. He had come to India just at the beginning of a time of transition. New forces were at work. The new ideal of government arrived fostered by such men as Cornwallis, Bentinck, and Macaulay, and crystallized on the renewal of the Company's Charter in 1833. It was no longer possible to shake the tree for a shower of golden pagodas to fall, to be had for the picking up. Nor had Colonel Cross the wit and the energy which are always required to make money, however easily it is said that it may be earned. Once, in '29, he had been able to go home, through a lucky stroke in the ownership of a horse and the arrangement of some races in Bombay. A year at home had proved more

than enough. He had married — a girl of eighteen and the daughter of an acquaintance in India. Her baby was born a month after their arrival in Bombay. The baby died at the age of a year, and the mother only survived it by a few days. The marriage had not been happy for her. The strain of the long seven months' voyage with child, the strain of its birth, the strain of the climate, and Miles Cross and his temper, his manners, his brandy and water, his dealings with the bazaar women when she was too ill to protest, all proved too much for her. They said the climate killed her as it had killed so many before; but her father said that he would horsewhip Miles Cross if he ever came across him. Miles Cross always referred to her as "poor Alice." That summed up her two years of married life.

And so the Miles Cross of 1857 lay sweating in his chair on his wide verandah and watched the heat haze on the jagged line of the rocky hills, the goats wandering across the dusty expanse of the parade ground, searching for herbage, and the lizards running in and out of the crevices under the few thirsty potted plants in the compound. Overhead the frill of the punkah waved gently to and fro, outside the sun blazed on the scarlet leaves of the straggling crotons which formed a sparse hedge. He breathed stertorously as he lay and sucked at the bubbling pipe.

After forty-five years in India he was of the age that was passing. In the India of that time men remained until they died. There were officers still serving at seventy and more. If a man did not die in

his twenties he stayed and settled. The cemeteries of India were full of the graves of the very young and the very old.

They made their homes in India, and a few did as Miles Cross had done — took the women of the country and formed establishments. Many houses in India had a "bibi khana," women's quarters, attached. They were buildings spacious and cool, slightly apart from the main house, with their own servants' quarters, where the women of the establishment lived. Miles Cross for twenty years had been faithful to one woman, principally because it had become too much trouble to embark on casual adventures. There were children, of whom two survived — his son John, now aged ten, who was at school in Bombay, and his daughter Agatha. Aggie at fourteen divided her time between the fat blowzy mother and her relations who inhabited the bibi khana, and the house where the Colonel Sahib lived with his crowd of servants — his khitmatgar and the bearers, the khansamah and the mussaulchee, the cooks, the sweepers, the syces, the punkah coolies and the watchmen, some twenty-five all told.

Miles Cross seldom went into the bibi khana. His mistress was fat and suffered from elephantiasis in the left leg. She seldom left the cushions on which she sat and slept, smoking her little green cigarettes and chewing betel and pan leaves, the juice of which she spat into a big brass spittoon which never left her.

CHAPTER II

Colonel Cross lay in his chair in a light doze. It was midday and very hot. The punkah flapped solemnly overhead, and outside in the glare of the sun there was no movement except of the hills, and trees aquiver in the heat haze, and of the swirls of dust raised by the burning wind which rattled the dry bones of leaves along the ground. He was awakened by the jingle of bells as a mail runner came round the corner of the house and halted at the foot of the verandah steps. Clad in nothing but a loin cloth, his body gleamed with sweat. In his hand he carried a spear hung with bells, — the sign of a mail runner, — and over his shoulder was slung a leather bag. He salaamed. His deep chest heaved and his sinewy legs trembled, for he had run both far and fast, the fourth relay of the line of runners from Aurangabad, the headquarters of the brigade eighty miles away. He had been pulled out of his hut three hours before and handed the precious bag. The orders gasped out to him were to carry it as quickly as he could to the Colonel Sahib Bahadur at Islamabad. He had left the runner who had handed him the charge lying stretched on a string cot in the shadow of the hut pouring cool water from a clay pot over his head and chest.

"Huzoor," the man panted from the bottom of the verandah steps, "huzoor."

Colonel Cross hated being waked like that.

"What is it?" he asked shortly.

"Huzoor, an urgent letter from Aurangabad."

Colonel Cross sat up and stretched. Wiping the sweat from his eyes, he shouted crossly for the khitmatgar. The man appeared, straightening his turban on his head, for he had been lying asleep just inside the dining-room door.

"Sahib?" he said.

"Give me that letter — and hurry, damn your eyes!"

The man went down the steps and took the letter from the runner, and returning handed it to Colonel Cross.

"Huzoor," said the runner, "I was promised bakshish if I brought the letter quickly — "

"Go," said Colonel Cross as he broke the seal.

"But, huzoor," said the man again.

"Get out and be damned to you!" shouted the Colonel, his face beginning to turn color. The man shrugged his shoulders and went, his spear jingling slightly as he walked.

"Bring brandy and water," said the Colonel to his khitmatgar as he turned again to the letter. The long cover was sealed, and inside it there was a second, also sealed, marked "Urgent and Confidential." Colonel Cross broke the seal of this also and unfolded the letter.

It was addressed to him personally from the com-

mander of the brigade at Aurangabad. It told how the news of the outbreaks of mutiny at Meerut and Delhi had been received over the electric telegraph from Allahabad — that there were grave fears of the spread of disaffection and of a sepoy mutiny on a large scale with a view to reinstating the King of Oude on the throne at Delhi. It ended: —

It is not thought possible that the movement will spread outside the limits of the United Provinces of Rohilcund and Oude, but I think that we should consider the possibility and you should hold both yourself and your regiment in readiness for active service at a moment's notice.

I firmly believe that the regiments of the Bombay Army are loyal to a man both to the Honorable Company and to Her Majesty, but you should take all reasonable precautions to protect them from the influences of revolt. I cannot conceive that the ryots of the local population will welcome any such movement. His Highness the Nizam has already expressed his complete loyalty, with offers of assistance such as he can supply as required.

We can only hope that the flames of rebellion will be speedily stamped out and suitable punishments visited on earth, as they surely will be in the next life, on those dastardly and cowardly murderers who have assassinated our wives and who would challenge the rule of the Honorable Company.

I have the honor to be, sir,
Your obedient servant,
JOSEPH MEAKIN, *Brigadier*

Colonel Cross folded the letter slowly, leaned back in his chair, and reached for his brandy and water.

Here was news indeed, but as he considered it he was less impressed. In his forty-five years' service in India he had heard news of a similar nature on two or three occasions. All affairs of the sort in his experience had been stamped out without difficulty and life had gone on much as before. It was a kind of madness which attacked men in the hot weather and which would pass.

He called for more brandy and water. Of course his regiment was safe. He knew the men and they knew him. They were all right. But if they should try any games he would know how to deal with them. As he thought of the bare possibility his color rose and his hand gripping the letter crumpled it slowly.

It was as he sat thus staring out into the sunlight that he was interrupted again.

"Oh, Papa, Papa, I heard the dak runner come in! I think he must have brought that next number of the *Keepsake* you wrote for to Bombay."

Colonel Cross heaved himself up in his chair and looked up the verandah to see his daughter Agatha. She came running down the stone floor of the verandah, dressed in a short-sleeved frock of India muslin, with her heavy dark hair tied back at the neck. She was small-boned and slim, and only the olive tint of her smooth pale skin betrayed her inheritance of Indian blood. She seated herself on the sleeve of her father's chair and, taking his handkerchief, wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Oh, my poor Papa — he does feel the heat so! And has the dak runner brought my book?" she said,

speaking in the clipped singsong of the child brought up in India. Her voice was shrill and rather harsh, and her speech generously besprinkled with Hindustani words, for she thought as readily in that language as she did in English.

"Why, no, Aggie," her father replied. "There was no dak in this morning, only a special runner from Brigadier Meakin at Aurangabad."

"Oh, Papa!" she said, excited again. "And does he send any message from my dear Miss Meakin?"

"No, you silly child, of course not. When a gentleman writes on business he does not have time to send messages to his daughter's friends."

"How dull," she said, lightly kissing his forehead. "I suppose he only writes of your sepoy-log like he always does. I think he is a tedious old man. Why does he not die and let us go and be Brigadier and live at Aurangabad, where there must be lots — oh, five or six — mem-sahibs for me to talk to, and lots of young gentlemen? I am tired of that Mr. Adjutant Gentles who can talk of nothing but horses."

"Well, my child, so we may some day — so we may when I am Brigadier. When I am Brigadier, perhaps we shall go to England and you shall go to a young ladies' school — how would you like that?" The idea tickled Colonel Cross, and he sipped brandy thoughtfully.

"Oh, naughty Papa!" said Agatha. "Brandy pani at this hour! You know Dr. Suckling told you not to." And she playfully seized the glass that Colonel Cross had just put down on the table, making as if

to throw the contents over the rail of the verandah.

"*Chup,* child, silence! Put that glass down this instant!" ordered her father, immediately irritated, as he always was at any playfulness directed at himself.

"Oh, naughty Papa, naughty Papa!" Agatha sang, holding the glass out of reach. Colonel Cross made a grab at it; it slipped from the girl's hand and fell, sending most of its contents over his trousers.

"You damned careless little minx!" he cried, as he bent to mop the liquor off his clothing with his handkerchief. The letter in the meanwhile caught the girl's eye and she picked it up and started to read it with a mischievous laugh. She was more than halfway through before her father noticed what she was about, and his annoyance at the accident of the brandy and water was not appeased by the discovery.

"Give me that letter!" he shouted. "Give me that letter! How dare you do such a thing?"

Agatha, seeing what she was doing, went on reading, giggling as she did so.

"You impertinent little slut!" cried the Colonel, rising from his chair. "Do as you are told — do you understand me? Do as you are told this instant!"

The girl finished her reading with a laugh and, folding the letter carefully, handed it to him with a deep curtsey.

"Oh, you funny old Papa!" she said. "You burra-sahibs with your secrets which everyone knows! Why, did n't you know all that before? I heard about it all days ago!"

"You heard about it?" her father gasped. "And pray from whom?"

The girl was shaken into seriousness.

"Why, Papa, I thought everyone knew. I heard Old Subedar Major Kanji Rama telling Mama all about it only the day before yesterday night."

And with a laugh she ran back to her room.

CHAPTER III

Colonel Cross dined at six, and at ten he was still sitting alone in his room over his brandy and water. The house was unusually still. There was no sound from the servants' quarters, no chatter and talk from the bibi khana, only the footsteps of the watchman on his rounds of the house and the cough which he produced, after the fashion of his kind, to show his wakefulness.

After an uneasy hour or two that morning, Colonel Cross had decided that there was nothing in what Agatha had told him. Everyone in India knew that rumors often outstrip the written official report, and this was only bazaar talk. It did not surprise him that his Subedar Major had told him nothing, for his was not a sympathetic nature that encouraged confidences of any kind from Indian subordinates. That his mistress had said nothing did not signify anything, for he had not been near the bibi khana for a week. Mr. Adjutant Gentles had been in at five with some orders to sign, and he was shown the letter which had arrived from Aurangabad. He was interested, but he agreed with his colonel that nothing need be done. The regiment could be trusted implicitly. He, too, had heard no previous news, and as it was on him that Colonel Cross relied for his intimate knowledge of the

regiment he immediately discounted what Agatha had said. If she had really heard anything at all, which he now doubted, it could have been only the wildest bazaar "gup." Adjutant Gentles clattered off on his bay pony back to his quarters, and Colonel Cross sat down to dinner without a cloud on his horizon.

He sipped at his brandy and water and smoked a long black cheroot. His thoughts were fuddled and rosy, and at last he dozed a little. The punkah waved solemnly overhead. There was no sound in the house except the squeak of the wheel over which passed the rope of the punkah.

An hour later he awoke with a start. He was hot and dripping with sweat. He glanced up over his head at the punkah, which was still. It was due to its stopping that he had awakened. He sat up and crossly shouted in Hindustani at the punkah coolie: —

"Hey, punkah wallah — pull the punkah! Pull, you pig! Are you asleep?"

But there was no answering grunt as the coolie awoke. The candle flames burned upright in the still air.

Colonel Cross rose from his chair, seized a riding whip, and went out on to the verandah, where the punkah coolie was stationed. There was no one there.

He shouted for the khitmatgar with no result, for the khansamah and his servants by turn. There was no answering call. He was now thoroughly roused, and as he went out on to the verandah he struck savagely at the chairs as he passed. At least the watchman must be at his post, and he would send him for the

other servants and horsewhip the whole rascally crew, beginning with the khansamah.

He stood at the top of the verandah steps and shouted. At last his efforts were rewarded. A quavering voice answered his call and into the light cast by the candles in the ceiling lantern crept old Soonoo Ram. He was hardly a servant now — he was too old, for he must have been nearly eighty. For forty years he had followed Miles Cross's fortunes as watchman, enduring blows and insults from no motives of fidelity, but because he could not endure a change. He never worked now, and enjoyed a precarious existence in a corner of the compound.

He was bent and grey. In one shaking hand he carried a bamboo staff and in the other a candle lantern. Round him was girt a rusty old sword with a curved blade.

"Huzoor?" he quavered.

"What are you doing, you swine?" foamed Colonel Cross. "And where are my servants? Am I to call forever? Go! Go to the quarters and call the servants — all the crew. Tell them I want them all."

"Huzoor," said the old man, "there are no servants now — only your lordship and I, Soonoo Ram; all the others are gone."

"You are mad!" screamed the Colonel. "Do as I order — and quickly!"

"Huzoor, as I say, there are no servants — only us two and the Missy Baba. All are gone. The womenfolk and the servants, all are gone." And he cackled a high cracked laugh.

Colonel Cross stared at him in amazement — never in his career had he been laughed at by an Indian. The veins swelled in his neck and his face flooded until it seemed to be purple. Then he said in an ominously quiet voice: —

"Come up the steps, old man — I have something to say."

The old man tottered forward and up the steps and salaamed low before his master. Colonel Cross raised his foot and kicked him brutally, then lashed at him savagely as he lay on the bottom step. His arm was suddenly caught.

"Oh, Papa, Papa, what are you doing to old Soonoo Ram? Oh, Papa, please!"

It was Agatha in her nightgown, covered with a light wrap.

The Colonel turned on her in his fury. "Get to bed, you little mongrel slut. Get to bed, I say." And thrusting her from him he lashed at her as she ran up the verandah to her room.

He turned back to old Soonoo Ram, who was groping blindly on the steps trying to find his lantern, his staff, trying to regain his feet. He was whimpering to himself.

Colonel Cross raised his whip again, but it fell from his hand. He gasped, he tugged at his collar, and he fell to the floor of the verandah. It was the apoplexy.

At last the house was still. The body of Colonel Cross lay in the circle of light cast by the verandah lamp. Old Soonoo Ram had crawled off to die like

an animal in the dark. Even the choking, frightened sobs from Agatha's room had ceased. There were rustlings and whisperings and light footsteps in the night, and at length a voice startling in its loudness and clarity: —

"Come, *jowanon,* the old hog is dead. There is no need for skulking."

The mutineers streamed forward into the light. Since dusk the regiment had begun to melt away — most of them to their homes. The John Company rule was at an end, men said, and when the Kings of Oude rode out to war with the last of the Company's army there would be fire and sword abroad in the land. They were thoroughly frightened, but a few, more brave than the rest, had stayed to pick up what they could in loot before they went home. They streamed into the light, led by one of their own officers. They were dressed as they pleased, but most had retained the red coatee and simply substituted the native loin cloth and shoes for the hated white trousers and boots. They all carried their muskets.

They stood at the bottom of the steps, awed by the presence of their colonel even in death. The native officer was the first to move. He seized a musket and bayonet, stepped forward, and drove it into the Colonel's body.

"See, the old hog is dead. Come, let us take what we will and burn the rest. What a pity the women have gone; we could make them dance to a fine tune."

Still uncertain, they paused a moment; then, like

a flock of sheep, the mutineers entered the house in a rush, stabbing, cutting, and spitting at the Colonel's body as it lay.

Alone, Agatha heard them on the verandah.

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

In the beginning of March 1914, Alie Cross was shipped off to England to learn to be a Missy Sahib. Alie was eight and a precocious child. She knew enough to be sure that a switch of her short skirts and a toss of her head could get her most things she wanted outside her own family circle. Nothing surprised her, not even that the captain of the *Basra* in which she traveled to England from Bombay should give her iced lime squash for turning head over heels on the carpet in his cabin high up on the bridge, or that he should have kissed her when she came up flushed and smiling triumphantly, shaking her brief blue skirt back into place again. It was quite natural — as natural as that old Mr. Papadimitriou, traveling to Port Said on highly important business, should give her chocolates to come down to his cabin to see his collection of funny bronzes. It was even more natural that Mrs. Kelsey, in whose care she traveled, should have forbidden her expressly to do it again.

"Why?" asked Alie.

"Because I say not," Mrs. Kelsey replied. "Children should n't ask why. You don't understand; some day you will, but not now."

All of which was quite natural, particularly the order forbidding her to do it again. At home she was

always being told not to do it again. It was natural, too, in that it was all part of the warfare perpetually waged between male and female, a war familiar to her at home in Ramapet. Alie for her own part liked men better than women.

The Crosses of Ramapet in Southern India were one of the old "county families." They were Eurasians, — what English people rather sneeringly call "chi-chi," — and they could trace their origin to at least one more or less respectable forebear who had held a position which sounded well in the newspaper notices of births, marriages, and deaths in the Cross family. Alie's birth had, in fact, been announced in due form as: "To Evie, beloved wife of Albert Edward Cross, grandson of the late Colonel Cross, killed in the Mutiny of 1857, the gift of a bonny daughter. Both doing well."

Who or what Colonel Cross may have been did not particularly matter. He was only a shadowy memory to be referred to as "my father, the Colonel," or "my grandfather, the Colonel," depending on whether John Cross or his son Albert Edward, who was Alie's father, was speaking. No one knew much of how he had lived or how he had died. As to how he had lived, possibly the less said the better. As to how he had died, the legend had arisen in the Cross family that he had been killed in action, gallantly leading the remnants of his regiment against the mutineers.

He must have been, they thought privately, one of the real old style of Anglo-Indian, pleasantly vegetating in an out-of-the-way station, with his women dis-

creetly stowed away in a bibi khana in a corner of the compound and a troop of blacky-white children gravitating between the bungalow and the women's quarters.

How he had come to India in the first place, what his antecedents might have been, they did not know. All that the Crosses knew was that he had existed to help plant the seeds of the Eurasian problem. As part of the problem themselves, they were duly thankful for him and his high-sounding title, and grateful that he had not been a subordinate in the Public Works or even in the Police. The Crosses were not a family who preferred to forget their descent from a Tommy-turned-railway-guard and a bazaar sweeper woman.

Who the Colonel's consort may have been the Crosses neither knew nor cared. The mere fact of the Colonel was enough for them. There were, as everyone knew, one or two cases of Englishmen who married — really married — Rajput princesses and princesses of Delhi. The Cross family preferred to think of the female founder of their line as one of these, rather than as the fat old woman of no particular caste with elephantiasis in the left leg who slipped off into the dark one night, leaving the Colonel to face his fate alone.

John Cross, Alie's grandfather, had only the vaguest memory of his father. He could remember his mother a trifle better if he thought hard — but hard thinking was not in his line. Like all the Crosses, he preferred the comfort of vague recollections.

Alie's Great-aunt Aggie could have told more could she have remembered, but then, across Great-aunt Aggie's mind there hung a merciful curtain of forgetfulness blotting out the days of the Mutiny and much that might have been, but was better not, remembered.

Those days remained a blank in her mind, and no one ever knew the details of what occurred on the night that the mutineers entered her father's bungalow. Mentally her growth had been arrested on that night in May 1857. Then she was a girl of fourteen, vivacious and pretty; now at the age of seventy-one Great-aunt Aggie was an ugly old woman with a dark and dirty skin and thin white hair. She was fat, too, and she sat all day slumped in her chair doing fancy work with wool. She could do fancy work, but knitting was beyond her. Sometimes she tried to knit, but she could not count her stitches and they got unaccountably dropped. If no one spoke to her and she could keep her attention fixed she could sometimes get through one or two rows correctly, but then something would always happen to distract her. The tame minah which was supposed to talk would make a noise that was so like a word that she would have to drop her work and take off her spectacles to look at the bird in amazement and say in her singsong voice: —

"Oah, Bobbee, that is so good. You talk the *bat* so well now, is n't it? Say it again, Bobbee. Say it again. *Bahut achha.* That is it. Oh my! What a silly girl I am. I have forgot my stitches — one, two, three — "

And Great-aunt Aggie would begin again the interminable business of trying to pick up the lost stitches.

Or it might be Alie, short skirts flying, come to tell Great-aunt Aggie, who always understood so well, about all that had happened at her school. Or to get her to play dolls — for Great-aunt Aggie was always ready to do that, and even had dolls of her own, which she washed, dressed, and put to bed with more interest than Alie could muster. Or it would be Alie come to tease her by pretending to let Bobby out of his cage, scratching at the bars until, squawking and excited, he would try to fly from his perch with a great fluttering and movement of wings. Aunt Aggie would drop her knitting and almost in tears implore Alie to leave the bird alone. Alie knew that she could do what she liked with Aunt Aggie, whom her mother described as a dotty old woman.

"Oah, Alie, leave him. Poor Bobby! Please leave Bobby alone. I am a bigger girl than you, and I say you must leave Bobby alone." Then she would try to leave her chair, which she could do only if Alie had not removed her stick.

The fun would go on fast and furious, more and more loud, until Alie's mother, Evie, arrived to spoil it all by the correction of her eight-year-old daughter and the pacification of Aunt Aggie, which was sometimes of such a nature that it dissolved the old lady in tears.

"Alie," she would command in her thin, sharp voice, "Alie, be quiet and leave the bird alone at once, or I 'll

take my hairbrush and warm your little BTM until you can't sit down."

Alie, with the memory of smackings in the past still glowing, at least in her memory, would slip out on to the verandah very subdued. One was not disobedient where Mother was concerned, though it was safe with Daddy.

Evie would turn on Aunt Aggie and, punching her pillows behind her with severity, would say: —

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, an old woman like you who ought to know better, exciting a child like Alie. She always seems to be naughty when she comes in to you. I think maybe I shall forbid her to come."

Aunt Aggie would promise it should not happen again, and Evie would push her knitting into her hands and whirl out of the room to chase after one or other of the servants round the house, muttering about the dotty old aunt in her care.

In the eighteen years since Evie's marriage to Albert Edward these Crosses had enveloped her like a blanket. Albert Edward was not the trouble — it was the Cross family, and Louisa, Albert Edward's mother, in particular. Louisa had come down to "help" before Alie was born. Six months later Louisa was still there, and John brought poor Aggie down from Bombay because there was no one to look after her there. When Alie was eight they were all still living in the house at Ramapet.

Evie had fought Louisa from the first, but it was like struggling with a down quilt, with a stifling mass

without vital points, soft and relentless as a snowstorm. Evie fought with all her energy, but she merely beat the air. Louisa fought with soft pats which in the end pulverized Evie's will power.

Even in the choice of Alie's name Louisa had had her way, and it was only when the child had been christened that Evie realized that the matter had been settled against her. There had been a scene. Louisa, fat and comfortable, was very apologetic.

"I did not know you did not want it so, but Alexandra Victoria is such a nice and such a good name. But I think maybe you are a little tired, is n't it? You feed the baby too much, and should give the bottle more."

All this time Louisa had known that Evie wanted to call her daughter Evelyn after herself. Alexandra Victoria! What a name!

It was significant that neither woman had ever mentioned a name to either Albert Edward or John, and without question they both accepted Alexandra Victoria when they heard it for the first time at the font.

CHAPTER II

Evie despised the Crosses as a family. She always thought that she married beneath her in taking Albert Edward. The Crosses had had their ups and downs, for Colonel Cross when he died left nothing but debts. Subscription lists were opened for Mutiny orphans, and partly with this assistance and partly with government aid John Cross was able to finish school and eventually at the age of nineteen to obtain a post as a sub-inspector in the subordinate branch of the Bombay Presidency Police. His service was uneventful, and at the age of sixty he was retired on a pension together with a nickel-plated revolver, a watch, a parchment certificate, and a Queen's Jubilee medal, awarded him at various stages of his service.

John Cross married a Bombay Portuguese girl at the age of twenty. Some people said that the priest made him marry Louisa Fernandez, but there was no doubt that Antonio Ferdinand Fernandez, her father, was glad to see him securely attached as his son-in-law. Antonio Ferdinand kept a liquor shop in Girgaum, Bombay, and he may have thought that a relation in the Police would be an advantage.

John Cross had no relations of his own except his sister, Agatha, but he soon found that by marrying a Fernandez he had provided himself with as many as

anyone could wish. Bombay Portuguese like the Fernandezes were given to large families, and he was constantly being called "old man" in halting English by relations whose natural language was Portuguese. He soon began to think that the money derived from the till of the Girgaum toddy shop was hardly worth the trouble. Louisa, however, had energetic qualities, and it was through her efforts that the darkest of the horde of very dark relations were gradually shaken off.

One of Louisa's first actions after her marriage was to sever her connection, on the grounds of its being too far out, with the church at Villa Parle near Bombay at which she and her family had always worshiped. There the priests were Goanese and black, and the acolytes wore cotton trousers and had bare feet. She transferred her attentions instead to a church in Bombay where the priests were European and the congregation several steps up the social scale. When Antonio Ferdinand died and left the liquor shop to Louisa, it was promptly sold.

Shortly — indeed, almost too shortly — after John Cross's marriage to Louisa, Albert Edward was born.

Amongst the Da Silvas, the Gonsalvezes, the Fernandezes, and the Rabellos from whom Louisa had come the profession of lawyer was the most admirable and, with her innumerable relations as potential clients, likely to be remunerative. Thus young Albert Edward was sent by his mother to Bombay University without a notion of what he was going to learn, and three years later, in 1890, he emerged, hardly knowing

quite how, with a B.L. degree and the right to practise as a pleader in Bombay courts.

Clients, however, did not seem to come to him and he still lived largely on charity supplied by his mother. Louisa endeavored to get her relatives to come to him for their advice, and they responded gallantly, for they wanted nothing more than an open invitation to go to law. Louisa's system, however, soon broke down, for neither did Albert Edward seem to do very well with the cases put before him nor did the relations pay his bills, which he soon tired of sending out. The relations argued, with some point, that there was no use in having a pleader cousin if you could n't get your law free from him. After all, his advice cost him nothing.

It was at this time that Albert Edward met Evie — and married her. Or, rather, she married him — for Evie was no weakling, nor indeed a beauty. She got what she wanted, a husband whom she could manage, and she did not miscalculate her power. She moved him to Ramapet, and there by her own efforts drove him to some success, to practice and position. Ramapet, with its railway workshop and Eurasian community, accepted him, and under Evie's direction Albert Edward succeeded in assuming at least the manner of an influential man.

CHAPTER III

It was Evie's idea in the first place that Alie should go home. Evie knew the value of a "home" background. Her brother Fred and her sister May had both been sent home at an early age, and she herself had not. This was her bitterest complaint in life. She was younger than either her brother or her sister, and when the time came when she might have expected to go herself her father died and she had had to stay in India with her mother. It was only as she grew up that she began to realize that had her father lived she might have had all the advantages of English middle-class life — and she had never ceased to mourn the loss.

Evie's father had been what they call "caught." That is to say, coming out as a youngster in the Indian Police, he had married a girl whom he later discovered to be a Eurasian. Those who have been stupid enough to be caught seldom get on in the service of the Government of India. There is something a little improper about Eurasians, especially the women, and it is better to transfer men with wives like that to out-of-the-way stations where the chances of social contact and ensuing complications are unlikely to occur.

Before Evie's father died Fred and May had got safely home. Fred, who now worked in the Ealing branch of Worthington's Bank, where his slight racial

discoloration could do him no harm, was held back only by his lack of efficiency in writing up accounts in the books.

May had married a solicitor of Worcester called Pethwick, and she, with the interesting and highly respectable beginning of having been born in India, could afford to look steadfastly to rapidly increasing prestige in the shadow of the Cathedral and the Close.

It was to Uncle Fred that Alie was to go — Uncle Fred, who had married Aunt Enid and who lived in Pretoria Road, Ealing. The suggestion that they should take Alie to live with them had come from Evie, and the hundred pounds a year which she had offered for this service left a very pretty profit in Aunt Enid's pocket. Aunt May had regretted politely but quite firmly that she could do nothing for the dear child. An extra hundred pounds a year did not mean much to her or to Pethwick, and there were the boys to think of. She could picture Alie, even at the age of eight, seducing them with her exotic orientality, and she imagined with horror the possibility of marriage with Cyril, for whom she proposed a dear little blonde blue-eyed wife in the years to come.

Mrs. Pethwick wanted nothing to do with her younger sister. Eurasian herself, she hated and despised the whole breed as only a Eurasian could. Evie she considered "chi-chi" — the old word stuck, and in some miraculous way she herself had succeeded in becoming pure-blooded white. The Crosses she considered worse than Evie, — practically niggers, she said

to herself, — although she was not above using them to her own social ends.

"My brother-in-law who is a barrister in India," she would say, leaving facts to the imagination. Indeed, she knew little of the Crosses, which was lucky, for had she known more they would not have appeared any more desirable in her eyes.

If the Crosses had been anything but Eurasians, Alie's departure homewards to the care of her Uncle Fred and Aunt Enid would have been comparatively simple. Albert Edward could afford it, but, since they all lived together in the big rambling house, nothing could be done without the knowledge and concurrence of everyone.

"Everyone," of course, meant Louisa and Evie; they were all who really counted. In this, as in all else through the years, Evie matched herself against Louisa. Those were uncomfortable days for Albert Edward, pulled this way and that, talked first one way and then the other as his mother and his wife manœuvred for position. He envied his father the art he had acquired of affecting to agree with everyone and never committing himself to an opinion.

Just as Evie was determined that Alie should have all that she herself had missed, so was Louisa determined that she should stay in Ramapet. She, at least, had the sense to see that in Ramapet the Crosses counted for something. Even in Bombay they were nothing; and in England, less than that.

"Oh you Evie!" she said. "Why do you wish to make Alie the Missy Sahib? In England they will

say, 'Alie, she is just one little jungly chi-chi.' Here she is Alie Cross, the *vakil's* daughter."

"But you don't understand, Mother," Evie replied. "My sister, she was like us, and she went home. Now she is a burra mem-sahib and she has a big fine place. My Alie will be like that."

"Huh," said Louisa incredulously, "huh; and she will think, like your sister, that we are nasty black nigger peoples. Ho, I know. If you wish your daughter — You, John Cross, what do you think, is n't it?"

John looked up mournfully from supping his tea from a saucer. He sucked his depressed moustache thoughtfully.

"Well," he said, "well, I say there is no accounting for the tastes. Maybe if Evie wants to send Alie she will do so, but if you do not wish it maybe she won't."

"Ho, ho," cackled Louisa. "*Bandar-log bol diya* — the monkey folk said, 'Now we can walk and are men.' Look at my husband, Evie," she jeered. "Maybe if you ask that Albert Edward he will tell as well what to do as my John."

Albert Edward, however, knew better by this time than to be in too often to meals.

"Well, maybe you think it fun to make it with your husband, but I say Alie will go home," Evie replied. There was a hard glitter in her eye and she was determined that the matter should be decided then and there.

"Alie is to go," she went on. "Was n't my father

English and in the Police, and Alie's great-grandfather English and a colonel?"

"Yes," mimicked Louisa cruelly, "and was n't your mother a dirty chi-chi just like Alie, and my father a Bombay Portuguese toddy-shop keeper, and was n't it the Colonel's woman a down-country *shattiyah?* Surely Alie shall have all we can get for her and be a little Missy Sahib and go about with men without anyone else there, like the mem-sahibs do here."

Evie rose, white and quivering with anger.

"I don't care what you say," she cried. "I have made *bandobust* for her to go, and I have paid the passage."

That settled it. Good money had already been paid. Alie would go home. Evie packed her trunks and took her to Bombay, two days' journey on the mail. There she bade Alie a tearful good-bye which, despite some real sorrow, ended with a minatory gesture as did nearly all Evie's conversations with her daughter.

"And now, mind," she said in the stuffiness of the cabin, "and now, mind — you be a good girl, because I 've told Mrs. Kelsey what she 's to do if you 're not. Now, mind — "

Alie, feeling vaguely that something was expected of her, cried dutifully when she was kissed good-bye.

If Evie had known that she would never see her daughter again she might have been warmer, but it is doubtful whether the knowledge would have affected Alie — much.

Luckily Mrs. Kelsey, the wife of a subordinate in the government cordite factory at Ootacamund, was

going home, and she, for a small consideration, agreed to take Alie in charge. Not four days out of Bombay she wished she had n't, and she wished it the more when a missionary doctor translated for her the kind of Tamil that Alie was teaching to his son.

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

It was a hot afternoon in June. Hugh Ranken lay in a deck chair with his feet up on the teakwood garden seat under the copper beech. His panama hat was tilted over his eyes to keep out the sunlight that dappled the shadows thrown by the tree on the close-mown lawn. Over his grey flannel trousered legs and the tips of his brown shoes he looked across the sunk fence to the green curves of the Malvern Hills rising abruptly from the flat country. He could see the whole length of them, the Beacon towering over North Malvern and tailing away in gradually lessening heights to Colwall and Cæsar's Camp to the South.

Between the sunk fence and the Malverns there are ten miles of landscape, but from the teakwood seat under the copper beech one's eyes are automatically carried to the heights of the Beacon, and it is only when one has time for more leisurely contemplation that one realizes how much lies between. There are meadows and fat trees, cider orchards and deep grass where the red and white curly-polled Herefords stand to the knees in buttercups and meadowsweet. There are the square grey tower of Rumbold Church and red roofs over warm red-brick cottages.

Hugh Ranken stretched, looked at his wrist watch, and, finding it was still half an hour to tea, put his

hands behind his head and focused his eyes again on the Beacon. The *Indian Census Report, Part II,* which was lying open face downwards on his chest slipped to the ground. He did not trouble to pick it up. The drowse of the afternoon, the hum of bees, and the distant sound of a machine mowing hay proved too much for him. He slept.

He had been working quite a lot too hard. Since he had come down from Cambridge two years before he had been acting as assistant private secretary to a Member of Parliament. The work was unpaid, but he had private means, and as his ambition lay in politics he had welcomed it for the experience and contacts it offered. For two years he had worked, but in April the Party went to the country and had just fought and lost a General Election. There had ceased to be enough work for him, and he had begun to cast about for something to do, when his chief made a suggestion. He should see the world, and in particular India, study Indian problems at first hand, and after a year's travel return home. Not that he suggested that Indian problems could be understood in six or eight months, or even studied deeply, but at least he could say he had been there. They would then see what they could do to find him a seat. The prospect of a year's comparative idleness and freedom was alluring and Hugh Ranken accepted it eagerly. Less than a week ago he had finished his last private secretarial job and he was free to do as he would.

Of course he had returned to the Peels at Rumbold. Since childhood he had known the red-brick Georgian

house which was not quite house agents' mansion size but merely a gentleman's residence. He could always picture the square-framed generous windows, the fanlight over the side door, the wide white French windows, the dusk and mahogany of the dining room, and the beautiful shabby carpet in the long drawing-room. Wherever he was he could always smell the faint tea and roseleaf scent of that drawing-room where Mrs. Peel was always pouring tea from fat-bellied silver, the warm smell of the wallflowers under the wall where the espaliered fruit trees grew, and the biting smell of burning October leaves at dusk. All his life all his best memories had been of Rumbold, for with no mother, and a father a colonial governor overseas, he had no home of his own.

He was just beginning to realize Phyllis Peel, nine years his junior. He had come down at Christmas, to see for the first time that she rode beautifully and that he minded when she did not dance with him as much as he wished. He noticed her looks too now — her slim height seeming scarcely a couple of inches less than his own length, her grace of movement, the straight way she held herself, and her grey eyes under her shining hair.

The *Indian Census Report, Part II,* dropped neatly on to his chest, awoke him with a start. He found Phyllis standing over him.

"Hugh, you are a fraud. I don't wonder at old Mainey losing his seat if this is a fair sample of the way you worked when you were supposed to be looking up data for his speeches. Anyone who allows his

chief to get muddled between Easter Island and Ascension Island deserves to be pushed out of office."

"Don't be mean," he said, smiling up at her through half-shut eyes. "You know very well that no one can ever hold him when he gets flurried at question time. They are both named after church festivals, and it is only incidental that they are far apart geographically. Besides, a classical education does not mean that you know where colonies are — it is merely supposed to make you fit to govern them, like my father, who once thought that gingelly was a port in India."

"Well, what is it, anyway?"

"Oh, I believe it 's a seed they export from somewhere in those parts. He wrote quite a long and interesting minute on the development of the port, and no one would ever have been the wiser if some clerk with a board-school education and a smattering of geography had not brought the matter to light before it was sent in. It just shows how a little knowledge can ruin anything."

"Well, it 's lucky you are going abroad," she said laughing. "At least you 'll know something when you come back. There 's nothing like travel for broadening the mind — as I always say. Come on, it 's tea time."

They walked towards the house across the lawn where a bed of scarlet geraniums stood stiff and tall in the sun. The wide French windows of the drawing-room were open under the mass of heavy-scented roses. Inside it was dark and cool, the holland blinds were drawn down to keep out the glare, and upright on her

chair Mrs. Peel sat pouring hot water into the teapot from the silver kettle over the blue spirit flame.

"Come on, children," she said, "you 're late. I suppose, as usual, you stopped Hugh doing any work?"

"Well, I suppose I did, if it could be called work. He was asleep under the copper beech when I found him. At least, his eyes were closed, but he would probably say he was thinking."

"Yes," said Hugh, "that is what I should have said if you had not taken the words out of my mouth. Quite frankly, and there is no point in hiding the fact, I was asleep."

"Poor Hugh," said Mrs. Peel, "I am sure you do too much reading, and I think you should get just as much sleep as you can. Phyllis, dear," she went on, turning to her daughter, "has Sutton started with the car into Worcester yet — because I wanted him to bring back some fish."

"I am afraid he has, Mother; I heard him drive down to the gate. But I 'll tell you what we can do — we can telephone to Johnston's to send it to Shrub Hill Station. He has only just gone, and the London train does not get in till six. It 's only five now. I think he went early to get that tire vulcanized."

She went out into the hall and there was silence until she returned.

"Is anybody coming?" said Hugh, biting into a lettuce sandwich.

"Yes, I forgot to tell you," Phyllis replied. "There 's that boy Alec Newton who is just down from King's, and a girl called Alie Cross. Her real

name is Alexandra Victoria or something like that. She's a funny little thing, about nineteen and awfully pretty, and quite sweet really. I don't think that she has many brains, but I want you to be awfully, awfully nice to her. You will, won't you, Hugh?"

"Of course I will. I am always nice, are n't I?"

"Yes, you 're all right, I suppose; but I think you can be quite dreadful if people are n't very clever. Alie is not a bit clever, but I feel rather sorry for her, and I want to do something nice for her because she is rather pathetic."

"You 're always helping pathetic people, Phyllis," said Hugh. "Is she really pretty, or are you only trying to cheer me on?"

"Oh, yes, she really is pretty, and she does n't know she is a bit pathetic — in fact, she finds everything very amusing and gets a lot of fun out of life."

"More tea, Hugh?" said Mrs. Peel. "Darling, how did you meet her? I know you have told me, but I must get it straight before she comes."

"Oh, Mother, you must remember. It was when I was skiing at Lanser See in the Tyrol last January with Margaret Holman. We were staying at the Gulden Sonne, and they had a big dance with all the village there. The place was full of Austrians and Germans, and no one understood a word of English except Margaret and me. I noticed her sitting at a table with a rather frowzy older woman, who left quite early. Then men started to ask her to dance. She seemed to like it at first, but there was one man who was quite, quite drunk. He kept being horrid

to her whenever they danced, until she began to get frightened. She tried to get him to go away, but he would n't."

"Then I suppose Margaret stepped in and gave him a thick ear for his trouble," interrupted Hugh.

"No," Phyllis went on, "the poor little thing came over and said, 'You are English, are n't you?' and we said, 'Yes.' Then she asked whether she might come and sit at our table, and of course we said 'Yes' again. She told us all about herself in the first five minutes — how she lived at Ealing or some awful place with her Aunt Enid, who was the older woman, because her father was a barrister in India, and how they were staying at the Lanserhof Hotel, and it was so dull with no boys there and only a lot of stuffy old people that as soon as she had heard there was a dance she had slipped into her best clothes and come straight over."

"Well, that does n't sound very pathetic," said Hugh.

"No, possibly not, but apparently she 's lived with this awful aunt of hers and an uncle, who is cashier in a bank, for years. She has n't seen her father since she was eight, nor her mother — who is dead, by the way."

"Well, even that —" said Hugh.

"Hugh, don't be a beast. The extraordinary part is that it turned out that she was the niece of those awful Pethwicks in Worcester. You know — the Pethwick woman with the fuzzy hair who always comes butting in whenever she meets you."

"Oh, Phyllis darling!" said Mrs. Peel. "You know

Mrs. Pethwick is a very good woman, and I don't think you need say such things."

"She may be," said Phyllis, "but do you know she stopped me in Worcester the other day and told me how we young ones do grow up."

Hugh laughed. "Poor old Phyll. You ought to have told her that it was a pity some young people were allowed to grow up at all. Those two sons of hers ought to have been painlessly put out of the way when their mental development ceased at the age of about seven."

"They are not so bad as that, Hugh dear," said Mrs. Peel, "and I 'm sure you ought not to say such things about our neighbors."

"Well, I still maintain that they are a pretty nasty pair. I can't cope with being called 'Old boy,' and I think someone ought to tell them that bérets and side-burns do not suit them."

"Well, anyway, Hugh, you will be nice to her, won't you?" Phyllis said.

"Of course I will, if you 'll promise me she is nothing like her cousins."

"No. She is much nicer. I think she 'll amuse you."

"Anyway, if she 's pretty I don't suppose Alec will give me much opportunity to be nice," Hugh replied, rising to put down his cup and light his pipe.

CHAPTER II

HUGH stood in front of the window tying his tie. The dressing gong had gone before the car had returned from Worcester, and as he looked out at the golden light and the long shadows thrown by the setting sun he idly wondered what this Miss Cross would really turn out to be. He had had experience of the girls Phyllis had asked him to be nice to before, and they had all been pretty awful. It was exactly like Phyllis to take up with anyone who could not get along alone or who had not a place to come to like Rumbold.

He tied his tie to his satisfaction, and, his hair brushed, he stood in the window in his shirt sleeves with his hands in his pockets. What a jolly, jolly place, with the light making the fat trees and the cows in the fields stand out unnaturally clearly. There was purple clematis round his window, and beyond the copper beech and the sunk fence the rabbits had come out in their hundreds, big and small, to feed on the cropped grass in the warm light of the evening sun. An old cock pheasant, glorious in green and bronze, stalked majestically down the hedgerow. Underneath the window Pooley, the gardener, stumped by in shirt sleeves, his old straw hat on the back of his head, and on a brown arm a wooden basket lined with cabbage leaves and filled with strawberries and raspberries all

warm and sweet from the sun. Judy, the cocker spaniel, came into sight from under the window, licking her chops from her supper, to take the last of the warmth and to blink drowsily from the lawn at the setting sun.

There had always been Peels here, he thought, and by Peels he meant, though possibly he did not know it, Phyllis of the even temper and firm loyalty — Phyllis who always knew what one wanted and who could be relied on to know just what to say if one did not get it. But never again would a Peel own Rumbold, for with Geoffrey the line had been cut. Poor Geoff, the last Peel, the best friend he had ever had, killed by a shell at Arras in 1918. At least, not quite the last Peel, for the old General had outlasted the War — only to die of influenza after the Armistice had been signed. The last Peel. But after all, as long as Phyllis was alive and had children a Peel would still own Rumbold, for they would be as good Peel blood as any — only the name would be different.

The clock from Rumbold church chimed the half hour sweetly. Everyone was bound to be late, but he turned quickly from the window and slipped into his dinner jacket. No one dressed much at Rumbold, and Hugh's dinner jacket was one he left there permanently, old and loose and, in this light, green with age. He wore a soft collar and a silk shirt, and as he left the room he slipped into his pocket his pipe and tobacco pouch.

He shut his door and went down the broad staircase with its wide treads and shallow risers. As he always

did, he stopped for a moment to look into the warm smooth lights of a painting of Venice which might have been a Canaletto but was n't. He himself had always thought it rather a bad picture, but in this summer evening light there was something attractive about it.

He went on downstairs to the hall with its big fireplace in eggshell blue framed with Dutch tiles depicting blue and white Biblical scenes — a hanging of Haman, his gallows towering above the city, a buxom Judith, and a dark blue Holofernes. When the artist ran out of Bible pictures he had introduced a windmill or a ship under full sail, bluff-bowed and round-sterned like a Rubens cherub.

The Peels always gathered in the hall before dinner, and to Hugh it was the most familiar scene at Rumbold. He picked up the evening paper from the table and sat on the leather-padded club fender, his shoulder propped against the mantelpiece. There seemed to be nothing — as usual. "Children's Emigration Bill, first reading." "Kent versus Surrey." "The Cliff Murder, Scenes in Court." Of course it would provide a "scene," whatever that was. "Wife Rubs Lodger's Corns with Liniment — Husband's Amazing Story." Yes, that really was an amazing story for once, provided it was true. Newspapers found so much to be amazed at which seemed quite normal to ordinary people. Here at last in his hands was a story so improbable that it could truly be labeled amazing. Could anyone ever be induced to rub anyone else's corns with liniment? He did not wish to spoil the

illusion by reading what the Bench had had to say on the subject. He turned on to the next page.

"Hullo," said someone. "You must be Hugh Ranken, I suppose. I 've heard lots about you from Phyllis."

Hugh looked and stood up. Standing in front of him was a slight dark girl with a pale olive-tinted skin. Her lips were very red and her cheeks faintly pink. Her eyebrows were pulled into a thin straight line and her cropped hair was close about her small head. She was dressed in a shiny frock of cloth of silver cut in an exaggerated V at the back and held to her shoulders by straps of paste brilliants. The shining metallic cloth outlined her body and ended just at her knees, to show a length of slender leg in silver fishnet stockings. She smiled at him from under the long lashes of her dark eyes as she stood in front of him, balancing back and forth on her toes.

"Hullo," he replied guiltily. "Yes, I am Hugh Ranken — and I suppose you must be Miss Cross whom I 've heard so much about too."

"Yes, I am Alie," she said. "No one ever calls anyone 'Miss' any more, you know. Only quite old people — and you don't look anything like as old as that yet. Anyway, I am going to call you Hugh. I think it 's much more fun than Mr. Ranken."

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Hugh. ("She really is pretty," he thought, "though I don't see why Phyllis should think her at all pathetic.")

"You know the Peels quite well, don't you?" she asked, coming a little closer.

"Yes, I suppose I do," Hugh replied. "I used to come here from school and the War ever since I was a kid. My father and General Peel were great friends, but they 're both dead now, you know." He did not quite know why he added the last sentence.

"You 'll have to help me lots," she said, putting her hand on his sleeve. "I don't know them at all except Phyllis, and we 're awfully good pals, but I 'm always scared to death by strange houses. You will, won't you, Hugh?"

He drew back rather uncomfortably.

"Of course I will," he said. "Anything I can do, you know — But Mrs. Peel is awfully kind, Miss Cross."

"Oh, please don't call me Miss Cross. Everyone calls me Alie. I shan't answer next time you call me Miss Cross."

Hugh laughed. He wondered why Phyllis should have asked him so specially to be nice to this child who was so engaging and appealing. She made him feel old and protecting, and he had never felt like that before.

Somehow Phyllis seemed just a little put out when she came downstairs in a coffee-colored lace frock with long sleeves, but Alie ran over to her and took her hand.

"Oh, Phyll, what a sweet frock!" she cried. "It 's perfect for a girl like you. I know you said not to dress much, but I 'm sure you won't mind me putting on this silly frock. It 's as old as the hills, and I hardly

ever get a chance of wearing out my evening clothes when I am with Auntie Enid."

"No, of course I don't mind. I think it looks awfully nice," Phyllis replied. "Oh, here 's Mother and Alec," she went on, turning as her mother came down the stairs dressed in sober long-sleeved black, followed closely by Alec Newton.

"Hullo, Alec," said Hugh. "You are down from King's for good, are n't you?"

Alec nodded and then turned to Alie.

"You are a mean little cuss, Alie, pinching the bath first," he said, "and then leaving me your water to run out. I believe you did it on purpose so that you could be down before me."

Alie laughed.

"You don't think girls dress slower than men, do you, Hugh?" she said.

"Of course not, Alie," he replied, as the parlor maid came in and spoke to Mrs. Peel.

"All right, thank you, Arthurs," she replied. "Shall we go in, children?"

As they trooped in to dinner, Alie whispered loudly enough for Mrs. Peel to hear, "Phyllis, how nice your mother looks in that black dress. I think black suits her so well."

CHAPTER III

PHYLLIS felt hurt and annoyed as she watched Hugh pull out her mother's chair and the movement of both men to do the same for Alie, while she herself was ministered to by Arthurs. It was true that Arthurs was standing behind her chair, which was directly in front of the service door, and that she always performed this rite for her. It was true also that Hugh as he passed round to his seat gave her chair a formal perfunctory little shove. But she had been ruffled when she first reached the top of the stairs to see Alie Cross with her hand on Hugh's arm, looking up into his face. Then her free use of Hugh's name and he of hers. It was so unlike Hugh, who always seemed shy and treated women with a courtesy that was painful enough to have become a joke between them. She did not mind the same kind of thing from Alec, for Alec was like that. He was much more than seven years Hugh's junior in his behavior, and at least they had had three hours together between London and Rumbold. Alie must have worked hard on Hugh, she thought, in the bare five minutes she had had him to herself, and he seemed to have responded.

Phyllis told herself not to be a fool, but she could not help minding the girl's frock and her exotic look. She looked so out of place in that mellow dining room,

with the rich mahogany of the table, the candles, and the rather shabby dark red paper on the walls which did not seem to have been changed ever since Phyllis could first remember the room.

Phyllis looked across at her mother, whose wise, sad face did not seem to notice anything out of place in this girl. Both men seemed to be hanging on Alie's every word, and at her end of the table Phyllis felt isolated and far away — almost, indeed, as if she were viewing a scene of a play.

"The dining room at Rumbold — O.P. door," and so on. She smiled as she wondered what the sedate Arthurs would say, with her years of service with the Peels, her corns and black felt slippers and her inside that always rumbled when she handed the vegetables, if she were asked to put on a lacy cap, silk stockings, and high-heeled patent-leather shoes and answer the telephone bell as the curtain went up on Act I.

Phyllis took what was offered her and ate, dropping in casual remarks mechanically as she watched the play of Alie's features. The child really was pretty. The expressions moved across Hugh's face in response to Alie's. How nicely the back of his neck, tanned brown, fitted into the back of his collar. The line of Alec's jaw was rather weak.

"Did you have a good journey, dear?" said Mrs. Peel.

"Oh yes, thank you," Alie replied. "It was sweet of you to send the car such a long way for me."

"We always do that," said Mrs. Peel. "It is the

least we can do for guests who are nice enough to come all this way to see us."

"Hugh," said Phyllis, determined to get into the play, but feeling so benumbed from sitting in the audience that she could think of no more natural entrance, "did you see the review of Hoppner's concert at the Queen's Hall in the *Times* to-day?"

"Oh, I love music," said Alie before Hugh could reply, sensing, as Phyllis thought, that there might be something started at the other end of the table in which she could not share. "I love music. I often go to the Albert Hall on Sundays when I have nothing else to do."

"What sort of music do you like best?" Hugh said indulgently.

"Oh, of course, I love good music. I don't understand much — do you? But I know what I like. Have you heard the new band they have got at the Savoy? A boy I know wanted to take me there only a week ago, and we should have had a marvelous time, but he got a cold and would n't go."

Phyllis felt herself slide back into the stalls again and listened to what seemed Alie's monologue. How could the others be interested in such senseless chatter?

"Auntie Enid does not like me going out much, but Ealing is so far out and so dead — I have to have some fun sometimes.

"Have you seen the new *Co-optimists?* I think David Burnaby is so funny where they play musical cricket and he sings 'The Lost Chord.'

"I love games. I 'm not much good at them, but I try to play — "

And so on.

And then she seemed to be away on the story of her life.

"Is it a long time since you have seen your parents?" asked Mrs. Peel gently. "I think it so awful for children who have to leave their parents in India."

"I haven't seen Daddy since I was quite, quite tiny," Alie replied. "You see, I left India when I was eight — oh, a long time ago. Mummy is dead now."

"Poor dear," said Mrs. Peel, patting her hand.

"It 's so sweet of you to say that," said Alie, looking at Mrs. Peel with wide-open, shining eyes. "But I have got to go back to India in October, because Daddy and my granny want me back."

"I am going to India, too, in November," put in Hugh.

"Oh, what fun!" said Alie. "I hope you 'll come to see us. We have a big, big house, and I know we can have lots of fun together."

"Your father is a barrister, is n't he, dear?" asked Mrs. Peel.

"Yes. But he was in the Indian Parliament or something until Mother died, and then he gave it up. At least, I think it was the Indian Parliament, but I am not quite sure. Anyway, he knew the Governor quite well, I believe."

"Possibly it was the Madras Legislative Council," said Hugh.

"Yes, I think that may have been it. Anyway, he

was decorated with a K. I. H., which is an Indian medal. Or it may have been a M. L. C., because he has 'K. I. H., M. L. C.' after his name."

"What are K. I. H. and M. L. C.?" asked Alec. "I 'm awfully ignorant about all those things."

"Might n't M. L. C. be 'Member of the Legislative Council'?" Phyllis dropped in sententiously. Immediately she wished she had n't. No one wanted to be informed.

"Yes, I should think it was," said Hugh; "and I suppose a K. I. H. is one of those things grateful governments give for good work instead of paying their servants a living wage."

"Dear Hugh!" Phyllis thought as she hulled strawberries with the aid of a fork.

"Grannie 's dreadfully old, and poor Aunt Aggie lives with us too. She was in the Mutiny, you know."

"Yes, that is old, is n't it?" put in Mrs. Peel, who was of an age herself when she began to dread the further extremes of old age.

Phyllis looked up sharply as Alie asked, "Do you know the Pethwicks in Worcester? They are cousins of mine, and there are two awfully nice boys, but I hardly ever see anything of them."

"Yes," said Mrs. Peel. "I think your aunt, Mrs. Pethwick, — she is your aunt, is n't she? — very nice indeed, but we see too little of her. I am sure the Pethwick boys are charming — at least, they always are very polite to me. Phyllis darling, don't you think we might ask Pooley to let us have a few more

strawberries? He is always so stingy with the fruit, and I am sure there must be more ripe by now."

"Yes, I 'll see about it, Mother. Shall we have coffee in the hall?" she replied. At last it was over. She felt neglected and depressed, unusual feelings for her. Usually things did not bother her, but somehow everyone and everything seemed hostile. She hardly realized from her seat in the stalls that the curtain had risen for Act II, "The Hall at Rumbold."

Evenings were spent quietly at Rumbold, Hugh when he was there often playing piquet with Mrs. Peel, and the others with books, but to-night Hugh made no move to set out the card table. Phyllis took up a book. She felt restless. She wanted air and the open. Outside the garden lay enticing in the twilight. She murmured something and slipped out through the library and thence into the garden.

She followed the broad gravel path that led to the orchard. The heavy scent of syringa brought a rush of memories.

Down in the orchard the long grass was wet with heavy dew. She stood for a moment leaning her hand on the cool, smooth bark of a cherry tree.

The chirring call of a nightjar made her dead senses live again. She was conscious of the sounds and rustlings of the summer night.

She turned. From the house the uncurtained windows shone in the growing darkness. She could see her mother in her chair — probably reading Mr. Forster's *A Passage to India.* Since Hugh had announced his intention of going to India her mother had read

books on India with an unconscious intensity. Phyllis smiled when she thought how Mrs. Carling, whose husband had retired after thirty years in the Indian Army, had warned her mother against it. Actually she had said, "It 's a thoroughly badly written and wicked book. I have n't read it myself because John said I must n't, and he read half of it and found it absolutely Bolshie." Mrs. Carling's opinion alone, thus expressed, was enough to make her mother read it.

She neared the house and looked through the window. Alie, Hugh, and Alec were sitting in a little group by themselves, chatting and laughing. She heard little of what they said, only scraps of words and then a laugh. Phyllis suddenly felt chilly. She reentered the room and found it too warm. No one realized her entrance.

"What a stuffy party," thought Alie, as she answered sallies. "Phyllis looks quite nice, but not a bit smart. Alec is a nice boy, and so is Hugh — very nice; and he would be much nicer if he did not make all these silly jokes which everyone seems to think so funny."

"I 'm simply longing to dance," she said in a low voice to Hugh. "I suppose there is n't a wireless, is there?" And she looked longingly at the smoothly polished oak of the parquet floor.

"No, there is n't, I 'm afraid," Hugh replied; "nor a gramophone either." He thought a moment. "Look here, let 's go into the drawing-room, and I 'll play the piano and you can dance with Alec. We shan't disturb the others."

"Oh, splendid!" she said, jumping up and seizing Hugh by the hand. "Come on, let 's dance."

Hugh seated himself at the big piano, pipe in mouth, and started to play — waltz, fox-trot, one-step, one-step, fox-trot, and then a tango. Alec held her close and danced like a dream. She wished she could dance with Hugh, who smiled at her every time their eyes met. She left Alec, came across to the piano, and lit a cigarette; then, putting an arm over Hugh's shoulders: "Hugh, you 're a dear to play like this. Make Alec play now, and come and dance with me," she said, thinking how nicely he smelled of soap and tobacco.

"I can't play, I 'm afraid," said Alec.

"Of course, you would n't, you dummy," said Alie, laughing at him and just avoiding the grab he made at her.

"Phyllis plays much better than I do," said Hugh. "Go and ask her nicely, and I 'm sure she 'll come."

"You go, Alec," said Alie, giving him a push. He went.

Alie hoped hotly that Phyllis would n't be mean and refuse. There was a moment's pause and Phyllis entered. "Why can't she look happy about it?" thought Alie.

For an hour Phyllis played, too numb and hurt to care what she did or why. She would have loved to dance with Hugh. Once he relieved her at the piano and she danced with Alec, watching Alie share the piano stool with Hugh, blowing cigarette smoke into his face, a bare arm over his shoulder to keep her seat.

It was all fun and meant nothing — why should she care?

The rest of the evening Alie danced alternately with both men. For her at least the evening was a success.

CHAPTER IV

ALIE rang the bell for Lily to come to fasten her dress. It was red taffeta, and there was just the one hook under the arm that she could not get at. It was a week since she had returned to Ealing from Rumbold, and the semi-detached house seemed shabby and stuffy after the well-ordered spaciousness of Rumbold. Instead of a big room looking over the green country to the Malverns, her bedroom looked across Pretoria Road lined with pollarded plane trees to a similar house on the other side. Instead of a big soft bed and a maid to call her with tea and wafer-thin bread and butter in the morning, she had an iron one and only Lily banging in to draw the blinds and bring hot water. Instead of breakfast with a row of hot dishes and casual arrivals, there was a meal timed by a bell, bacon and fried eggs pushed under her nose, would she or not, and Uncle Fred gulpingly eating before a hurried departure to the bank. Alie's temper, never very good, had been worse than ever in this last week, and her aunt had had her hands full.

With the advent of Hugh into her life had come opportunity to do and see the things she had never had a chance to do and see. She longed above all things to become familiar with the smart world which to her was represented by the pictures in the society

sections of various papers. She felt sure Hugh must have the key to it. The young men who flitted around her in Ealing were not of that world. They worked in banks and offices and could not afford what Alie most desired — all the world.

The height of Alie's ambition lay in a stall at a theatre and dancing at the Cabaret Club or Phyllis Court, but she had seldom had a chance for any of these things. With money enough to provide herself with any number of showy frocks, she was tired of displaying them in Soho, at best in the dress circle and at the Palais de Dance.

To-night, however, all was going well. She was going to dine with Hugh at Rupert's in Jermyn Street, to a concert with Hugh at Queen's Hall, and, she hoped, to supper and dancing with Hugh afterwards. The concert was not very exciting, but Alie reflected that there would probably be lots of smart people there, and she was determined to make up for the quiet beginning to the evening by wheedling Hugh into giving her a really good time after the concert. At least, she had the key, and her aunt had been told not to expect her back before daylight.

Alie ran a comb through her short black hair, brushed it, and looked at her eyebrows in the mirror. The light was bad in that small room and she had had to tie the cord of the electric light to a nail in the wall to get it to fall correctly. The eyebrows ran in a thin line of penciled black — her lips had just the right amount of make-up on them. She would have to hurry. She was to meet Hugh at half-past seven,

and it would take her fully half an hour to get to Jermyn Street in a taxi. She could n't bear the trains. They took the excitement out of an evening, making her feel that all the effect had gone out of her make-up. She liked to arrive fresh from her mirror, as it were, stepping out of a taxi like an actress coming on to the stage and making everyone look at her.

"Come in," said Alie to the knock at the door, and Lily shuffled in.

"You 've been a long time coming," said Alie without bothering to turn.

Lily sniffed. "Oh, 'ave I?" she said.

"Yes," said Alie. "Now hurry up. I want my dress fastened. Have you washed your hands?"

"Yes, I 'ave," said Lily, "and is there anything else your ladyship would like to know?"

"Don't you answer back. Let me see your hands. Well, I suppose they will have to do," said Alie turning her side to the maid and raising an arm. The maid bent her head, breathing heavily, and struggled for a moment with the hook.

"There," she said. "That 's a pretty new frock you 've got, Miss Alie," she went on enviously.

"Now then, my back," said the girl, handing Lily a powder puff, "and for Heaven's sake be quick."

The maid started laboriously to powder the back in the deep V of the frock.

"You are slow," said Alie impatiently. "Oh, hurry" — and in turning impetuously she swept the powder box to the floor with her hand.

"Oh, you little fool!" said Alie, striking Lily on the

arm. "You just get that cleaned at once and have it clean before I come back. If you had n't been so slow this would n't have happened." She seized her black silk wrap and swept from the room, leaving Lily in tears. "And serve her right," thought Alie angrily, feeling sorry for herself with only someone like Lily to wait on her.

She was just opening the front door when her aunt, sitting in the drawing-room with the door open, called to her.

"Alie dear," she said, "would you like me to leave some soup out for you in the thermos bottle?"

"Oh, all right," she said ungraciously, and slammed the door.

There was only a short distance through the warm light of the evening sun to where she would find a taxi, and muffled to the eyes in her wrap she walked with short quick steps. She passed young men in flannels, tennis racquet in hand, swinging down the road, girls in white drill and blanket coats, men in light cars and on motor cycles, and men and girls with dispatch cases hurrying back to get a breath of air after hot days in stuffy city offices. She breathed the warm dusty smell of asphalt and petrol and hurried on, pretending not to notice the admiring, envious glances thrown at her as one who could afford to dress and to dance in the West.

She loved it all — as much the stares of the men who may have hoped impossibly to catch her eye and an inviting smile as those of the girls who in their uniform shades of beige and tight-behinded frocks

appraised and priced her from top to toe with indifference so complete as not to deceive.

She hailed and entered her taxi. It was a long drive to Jermyn Street, but Alie settled herself with her little mirror to make sure that nothing more could be done to her face or hair, and the time passed pleasantly. She would if she could have had Hugh to fetch her, but she did not want him to see the household at Ealing. She quaked at the idea of his meeting Aunt Enid and Uncle Fred — especially Aunt Enid, with her frizzy bobbed hair and lined face so carefully and so badly made up, Aunt Enid who, with her studied accent and her genteel ways, did her best to be nice to Alie's young men.

The taxi threaded its way through Acton and past the Napier Works, and Alie's thoughts turned to Hugh. What fun they had had at Rumbold, even though Phyllis had acted so stiff and tried to spoil Alie's good time. Hugh was nice, a very nice boy, slow and quite dull, yet there was something about him that was distinguished and not like anyone Alie had known before. She enjoyed the feeling of having a new admirer. It was nice to have him tagging round after her, and she meant to take everything that he could offer her. She wondered if they would be able to travel out to India together. That really would be fun, because he had letters of introduction to all kinds of people. She herself was to travel out with the McKenzies — a nice couple, but quite old. He was in the Civil Service or something in Ramapet, and had promised to look after her. Having Hugh there

would make things a lot easier, and he had said he would see if he could get his passage changed to the *Cochin* a month earlier than he would otherwise have gone. He would be able to help her not to see too much of those stuffy McKenzies and to know all the young people on the ship.

She cared for Hugh quite a lot — yes, quite a lot, Alie assured herself, to make the evening more amusing. Hugh obviously thought her wonderful. The thought of how wonderful she was lasted her all the way to Jermyn Street.

CHAPTER V

Alie stole a glance at her programme. Hugh was looking straight ahead of him at nothing in particular, it seemed to Alie. He was n't looking at the orchestra, anyway, and he had n't looked at her since the music had started. He sat so still that it made Alie want to fidget. He had n't spoken to her since they arrived except between numbers — except once when he had begged her pardon for touching the elbow which Alie had pushed gently over to his side of the chair arm, hoping to establish a slight contact which would make the concert pass more amusingly.

Alie regretted that she had pretended to like concerts. It was really Phyllis's fault for asking her such a stupid question. Alie knew now that she hated them. She liked music with a tune to it, something that made one want to dance or sing, music with a meaning. This sort of thing was awful. It just went on and on, and there were n't even names for the different pieces that had any sense to them. "Op. 13" and "Andante" did no one any good. She lost her place on the programme and she had no idea how much longer the concert would last. She tried to remember how many times the music had stopped and to count down the programme, but she had to give it up. Once she had clapped, thinking it was the end of the piece,

and it had n't been. She had counted off the piece as she clapped, and she was afraid she had counted it again when it really had ended. Alie's irritation grew. The people about her were not in the least smart, and they were all sitting looking into space like Hugh. Alie reflected that she could have come with water-wave combs in her hair and no one would have noticed.

She tried to amuse herself at first by remembering dinner, which had been fun. Hugh had ordered it beforehand, and evidently considered Alie the frail flower she liked to seem. She had picked lightly at the delicacies he had ordered for her, and had amused him by begging for a little brandy after dinner just to see what it was like. She loved begging for brandy and sipping at it with puckered eyebrows while Hugh laughed to see her bury her nose in the enormous glass filled with cracked ice. Alie had found that brandy after dinner made the rest of the evening go in a lively fashion, and she always had a little if she could get it, but with someone like Hugh it was better to pretend she found it new and alarming. Hugh, she knew, loved to think he was protecting her. After being cheery and a good sport for so long, Alie found her new rôle of an appealing feminine creature very entertaining. Hugh had told her, too, that he was going on the *Cochin* with her. He had had his passage changed, and as he told her he smiled and said he believed she 'd need someone besides the McKenzies to amuse her and look out for her. Alie had wished at the time that his smile had n't reminded her of Uncle Fred's expression when he looked at her. She liked to

think that Hugh was madly in love with her and would do anything for her, and his expression of genuine concern and fondness spoiled things. Alie bit her lip as she realized what a stupid, dull evening it was being after all.

Mercifully the music stopped, and Alie resolved to stay no longer.

"Hugh," she whispered, "is it terribly hot in here?"

"No!" said Hugh in surprise, and then with some anxiety, "Do you feel all right?"

"Why, of course." Alie nodded, but let her eyelids droop a little. "Hugh dear, would it be awful if we went out for a breath of fresh air? I know it is silly, but I feel terribly stuffy."

Hugh gathered Alie's wrap on to his arm. "Poor old Alie," he said. "Here, take my arm and we 'll get out quickly."

Alie put a limp arm in his. "Old" was not what she liked to be called, but Hugh was always using expressions that he used to men or dogs — or Phyllis, Alie reflected, as she let Hugh lead her up the aisle. She really must wake him up. The evening was positively creaking.

She hung on his arm until they reached the lighted sidewalk in front of the hall. It was a clear night and the air was fresh. Alie breathed deeply. Hugh was looking at her anxiously.

"Look here, Alie," he said, "I believe you did n't eat enough dinner. You did n't really touch anything except the ice! I believe you 're just faint for want of food!"

Alie accepted the suggestion gladly.

"Oh, Hugh!" she protested. "Don't be silly! I ate loads. Only music always uses me up — Aunt Enid says I feel things too hard and it uses up all my energy. It was the air in there, too. But I should like a little something to eat now, and a change of air. Only you must hear this next thing, Hugh. Do go back, and I 'll wait here. Please don't bother about me."

"Nonsense!" said Hugh. "We 've heard all but the last number. Let's go somewhere where we can talk and have something to eat. Where would you like to go?"

"Oh, Hugh!" said Alie. "You 'll think I 'm so silly, but I'd love to go to the Savoy! I 've been shut up in Ealing for days, and I 'd adore to see lots of people all dressed up and having a good time!"

"What an amazing child!" thought Hugh. "To want to go to the Savoy on top of feeling faint!" But he found her appeal amusing and rather touching. With a laugh he put her into a taxi and said, "The Savoy Hotel," to the driver.

"Hugh, you are a darling," said Alie, putting her arm through his and leaning against him a little. She closed her eyes, and Hugh, imagining that she would rather not talk, kept quite still until they drew up before the hotel.

Three hours later Hugh handed Alie out of a taxi in front of the little house in Pretoria Road. He felt sleepy and as if he had breathed too much used-up air.

He said good-night and returned to the taxi.

"Would you mind putting the top down?" Hugh asked the driver.

"Not a bit, sir, not a bit, sir. On a fine night like this you like to 'ave the air, don't you?" the man said as he threw back the roof. "And where to now?"

Hugh looked at his watch. It was just three o'clock.

"Oh, Marble Arch, please," he said as he seated himself. He could walk home down Piccadilly to his rooms off Jermyn Street. The walk would do him good. He lay back and breathed deeply of the cool fresh breeze.

Poor Alie and that pokey little Ealing house shut in by bricks and mortar, and the oppressive figure of the aunt and uncle Hugh had never seen! Poor Alie! She had never had very much fun, and she was such a charming baby with her attempts at sophistication.

Alie had never had a chance. It was so easy for dear old Phyll who had always had everything to be nice and easy with people. Phyllis who by her bringing up had been taught to appreciate books and to like listening to music and to talk about it. It was in her blood, but Alie had had no such advantages.

Acton, Shepherd's Bush, Bayswater — the taxi came to a grinding stop at the Marble Arch. Hugh got out and paid the driver. He stood for a moment on the edge of the pavement while he filled his pipe slowly and thoughtfully, pressed down the loose strands of tobacco, and lit it with care.

Hugh thrust his hands into the pockets of his light overcoat and encountered something strange. It was Alie's handkerchief rolled tightly into a little ball. As

he looked at it under a lamp his nostrils caught a drift of the scent which pervaded Alie — the Alie slim and warm in his arms as he danced with her, the Alie who had thrust her hands into his coat pocket as they drove home together, the Alie who had used a corner of his coat for warmth as they sat in the taxi.

Poor Alie needed a lot of looking after. People like Phyllis looked after themselves — they were trained to it by instinct, tradition, and upbringing; but Alie was somehow different. Everyone seemed to be repressive, even the McKenzies.

Without realizing it, Hugh, as his temper rose at the thought, walked faster down Piccadilly. It was almost deserted at that hour. There were a few people about — mostly women who had drawn a blank in their evening's patrol and who were returning homewards despairing of finding a market for their charms. They looked at Hugh, appraising him as he walked by. Some gave him a mechanical "Good evening, dear. Where are you going?" saying it with closed lips so that it would be hard for any to see who had spoken, that any watchful constable would be unable to bring an accusation for soliciting. Others passed him by thinking either that his sort was no good or that some girl luckier than they had found him first. He looked the kind that would pay well.

He was quite unconscious of the fact that one woman was following him, that she had overtaken him twice and had spoken to him as she let him overtake her twice.

Hugh turned down towards Jermyn Street, and as

soon as he had done so she came up with him again, and falling into step with him as he walked she began her urgings again.

"Where are you going, dear?" she said. "Come home with me — it 's only just off Coventry Street. You are a nice boy, and I only go with nice boys like you."

Hugh looked down and noticed her for the first time. She too was slim and dark, and her face looked tired under the jaunty, tawdry hat. She probably had no tradition to look to either, and had never seen the well-ordered comfort of a Rumbold with the scent of syringa and tobacco plant coming in through the windows on a warm June night.

"No, I am sorry," said Hugh, unwilling to offend anyone. "I 'm sorry I can't go with you."

"Oh, come on, be a sport," said the girl, slipping her hand through his arm and pressing herself to his side. "Oh, come on, be a sport. I 've got a little flat and I can give you a good time. I 've got a bottle of whiskey and I have been looking for a nice boy like you. I don't go with anyone. I 'm not like the other girls."

"No, I am sorry," said Hugh, determinedly hurrying on. "I can't do anything for you."

The girl was desperate and she hung heavily on his arm. When she spoke again she was almost in tears.

"You must come," she said. "I have n't found anyone for three days, and I might have had one man to-night, but he was drunk and I did n't like him. Be

a sport and a good kiddie. You 've got such naughty eyes, and I 'll give you a good time, you bet."

Hugh heard the desperation in her voice and stopped uncertainly. Then feeling in his pocket he pressed two pound notes and some loose silver into her hand.

"I am sorry I can't do more than that."

The girl looked at the money in amazement. And Hugh, turning to hurry on, almost ran into a police constable.

The policeman eyed him suspiciously.

"Good night," said Hugh.

"Good night, sir," said the policeman uncertainly, wondering what it was that had changed hands between the two.

Alie had n't had a real chance, Hugh mused, returning to his train of thought as he fitted his key into the lock.

CHAPTER VI

It was the end of October when Hugh went back to Rumbold for the last time before leaving for India. He was to sail in the *Cochin* from Marseilles in mid-November. His tropical kit was bought, and his heavy baggage had gone on board. He shut his rooms in London in the first few days of the month and went to spend his last fortnight in England at Rumbold. As he drove from the station he found everything as he had always known it. There were bonfires glowing in the dusk, stinging the nostrils with the scent of wood smoke. As the car dipped into the valley they ran into an October mist heavy with the smell of dead leaves. He loved the autumn with its keen air, its scents of russet apples, and the tints of the woodlands, golden and brown.

He arrived at a Rumbold where Mrs. Peel sat under a shaded light in the hall in front of a wood fire. The flames flickered on the silver of the teapot, and there was hot toast and tea cake dripping butter. Phyllis sat in the shadow by the fire, her long legs curled under her in the big leather chair. She rose to greet Hugh, and Hugh found her hand cold and limp in his. There seemed to be something missing in the welcome back to what he considered home.

Phyllis was strangely altered in her manner towards him. She was constrained in attitude and her speech was stilted and curt, and although Hugh hardly noticed it Mrs. Peel did. She knew that her daughter was trying to conceal her hurt. She knew, too, that Hugh had not written regularly as he usually did, giving detailed accounts of all that he had done, of his hopes and his ambitions, with comments on the doings of others. The reading of extracts from Hugh's letters had ceased to be a feature of life at Rumbold.

Mrs. Peel's questions, craftily put and only after deep thought, "I do hope Hugh is not overworking; we don't seem to hear from him much nowadays," had met with little response. Only a, "Oh, Hugh's all right, I expect," or, "I should n't worry about Hugh if I were you, Mother. I have got to go to Worcester to-day. . . ."

Hugh stood in front of the fire warming his hands. The firelight caught the diamonds in Mrs. Peel's engagement ring as her hands moved from teapot to silver sugar bowl, from sugar bowl to cream jug. Phyllis curled into her big chair, merged into the shadow. Her neck glowed over the warm brown of her velvet frock, and her shining hair was outlined against the dark red leather chair-back.

Everything was familiar to Hugh. He fitted into Rumbold so easily that he found it hard to believe that he had been away. The very fragrance of the China Darjeeling blend was Rumbold in its familiarity. Nowhere else did he get tea like that. Hugh, glad to be

home, did not realize that the old order was indefinably changed, that he was talking to Mrs. Peel and that Phyllis had little to say. Unconsciously he found himself asking Mrs. Peel about the horses, about the dogs, and how the pheasants had come on. Usually Phyllis would have been the one to answer — all these things were in her province. Mrs. Peel would have sat silent, busy with the kettle, listening and throwing in comments — some so far from the subject that they seemed inconsequential, but in reality of the type that showed how her mind ran.

"Did you have a good journey, Hugh?"

"Did you notice whether there was a basket in the car? I told Sutton to fetch the new tulip bulbs which should have come. Pooley has been worrying me every day to get them in."

"Harcroft says that the pheasants are very strong this year, and I know he wants to see you. He will want to make you shoot to-morrow."

And all the while Phyllis was sitting back in her big chair never saying a word.

"Hugh," said Mrs. Peel, "would you like to have anyone stay here for your last week?"

"Alie Cross is staying in Worcester with those awful Pethwicks." He never noticed the little movement Phyllis made as if to ward off a blow. "I wish you would ask her here for a few days. She is sailing on the *Cochin* with me, and I know she would love it."

"Why, of course, Hugh," said Mrs. Peel, her head bent to blow out the spirit lamp under the silver kettle. "Of course, if you want her."

Phyllis said nothing, hoping that nothing had been noticed.

Arthurs came soft-footed into the light thrown by the one shaded lamp and coughed.

"If you please, m'm, Harcroft would like to have a word with Mr. Hugh. I have shown him into the library."

"Oh, thank you," said Hugh. "I 'll come now." And he walked across the shadowed hall to the library door.

"I think I 'll go up and dress," said Phyllis, rising; and Mrs. Peel's eyes followed her as she went up the broad staircase.

CHAPTER VII

PHYLLIS, when she got to her room, shut the door and did not turn on the light. Instead, she went straight to the little low armchair before the fire. She sat down heavily and watched the glow in the coals, elbows on knees, with her chin in her cupped hands. She loved Hugh — Hugh was all she wanted. She had known for a year that she loved him. She was his for the asking, and now this Alie had stepped in to spoil everything. She had known that she cared for Hugh more than for anyone else in the world, but suddenly had come the realization of the physical Hugh who could do everything, whose back tapered down from breadth of shoulders and depth of chest to the narrow muscularity of his loins. He had never kissed her — had he ever kissed Alie? She did not know. Alie seemed to be able to make him do anything, and if he had it would all have been Alie's fault. She wanted Hugh — her body warmed to the feeling of his arms around her, which she had never felt. She remembered Hugh when she first knew she loved him. Things had paused for a second in mid-air. She had met him coming back from a ride, Hugh laughing, with his eyes crinkled as if the sun were in them. That was the Hugh she wanted.

She did not hear her mother come into the room,

and she did not hear the door softly close. She only knew her presence when her mother stood beside her saying: —

"No light, darling? The fire is nice, though, is n't it?"

Phyllis looked up to find her mother, back turned, straightening the cushion in the other armchair.

"May I sit down, dear?" she said. "How nice your brown frock looks. It 's just like October." Then, judging that Phyllis had had time, she sat down facing her.

"I do hope it is going to be a nice day to-morrow for Hugh in his last week here. He loves the autumn so."

"Mother, who else is coming besides Alie Cross?"

"Well, darling, after you had gone Hugh said that he would like to have the Branders from Hilton, and I think he mentioned one or two others, but he is going to tell me later. Is there anyone you would like?"

"I don't think so, Mummie darling," said Phyllis thoughtfully.

"I thought you might like to have Alec Newton; he is such a nice boy, and you don't meet many young people."

"Oh, no! I simply can't bear him — he 's so silly."

"Why, I thought you always liked him," said her mother. "You always said you did."

"Oh, I like him all right, but not as much as all that."

There was a pause, and Phyllis went on, "Mother,

don't you think that Hugh is seeing quite a lot too much of Alie Cross? She 's rather a tough little chit, and she seems to be about with him always."

As if Phyllis had said, "Oh, Mother, please don't ask Alie. I love Hugh and I want him to myself, if only just for the last week he is at home," Mrs. Peel understood.

"But, dearest, don't you see that 's just why I am going to ask her?" she replied. "Don't you see that she 's miles beneath him, and he must realize it sooner or later, and it will be the sooner the more they see of each other?"

Phyllis knelt to poke the fire. She rattled the poker viciously against the brass, and there was a collapse of glowing coals which set the red flames flickering again. She rose and stood with her back to Mrs. Peel, her elbows on the mantelpiece, her head bent, looking into the fire.

"I suppose you are right, Mummie — you usually are," she said; "but I wish we could have arranged it some other way."

"So do I, darling," said Mrs. Peel, coming over and putting her arm over her daughter's shoulder. "So do I, with all my heart."

"And now you 'll have to go and dress," said Phyllis, turning quickly. She opened the door for her mother, and Mrs. Peel went out without looking at her daughter.

Half an hour later Phyllis got up from her bed and turned on the light. She looked at herself closely in the glass. Her eyes were red and puffed and she

dabbed angrily at them with cold water, and then cold-creamed her face. She did not care how she looked — why should she? She knew she was nice-looking, that Alie could not hold a candle to her mentally or physically; but if Hugh was fool enough to be taken in by her — well, that was his business.

The line of her jaw was hard and uncompromising and her eyes had a cold, uninviting light in them when she went down to dinner. At dinner she praised Alie extravagantly, taking a grim delight in the pain to herself, and then rounded on Hugh when he dared to express an opinion for himself.

Hugh, bewildered and uneasy, not understanding anything that was going on around him, went to smoke his pipe alone in the library. He stood in front of the fire looking at the flames, sucking at a pipe that would not draw, and then went into the gun room. He fingered the oiled stocks, tried his own gun to his shoulder, and squinted down the barrels. He seemed to derive some comfort from it.

In the hall Phyllis, curled up in her chair, pretended to read a book. In her heart one side of her, her pride, commanded her to ignore Hugh — if he wanted to demean himself, let him do so. The other side, her love for Hugh, cried out against herself. Why had she been so mean to him? Oh, Hugh, Hugh, she wanted him so much!

Phyllis slammed her book shut and made her mother look up. She had to see Hugh. She would go to the library and Hugh would see her and understand. He would take her into his arms and would know how to

comfort her. She must see Hugh, who would understand. Surely he must understand.

She rose and went into the library. Hugh was examining the shelves for a book. He turned with a smile at her entrance.

"Oh, Hugh, darling Hugh" — but no word came from her lips, only: —

"Would you like the decanter and siphon brought in here?" she said.

"Oh — er — thanks," said Hugh.

"Good night," said Phyllis.

"Good night, Phyll," said Hugh.

CHAPTER VIII

A WEEK later Mrs. Pethwick drove over from Worcester to take Alie to Rumbold. When the invitation first came she had been inclined to tell Alie that she ought not to accept, for Mrs. Pethwick's sense of dignity had become an obsession with her and she regarded every act of others as an intentional slight. A moment's thought, however, convinced her that she ought to make use of the opportunity offered to make the beginnings of an acquaintance with the County. She had no feelings in regard to Alie — indeed, she was more than prepared, when she had considered the matter, to let her go, for Cyril, her elder, and Gerald, her younger, son had both shown themselves attracted by their cousin. This in itself was not unusual, but Mrs. Pethwick, with the knowledge of Alie's ancestry clearly before her, was not going to take any chances.

Alie had been with them in Worcester for a week on the second visit she had ever paid them since she had arrived in England, eleven years ago. There was little or no communication between Mrs. Pethwick and her brother Fred since he had made it abundantly clear that he was not to be successful at the bank and since he had become firmly anchored to Pretoria Road, Ealing. Mrs. Pethwick in her climb to social prominence in Worcester could not risk including any taint

of suburbia among her other handicaps, and the cashier of Worthington's Ealing branch was allowed to drop quietly out of her existence.

Cyril was driving the car, and as it rolled smoothly out of Worcester, past Shrub Hill station, and on to the Alcester road May Pethwick began to feel first satisfaction and then elation at the turn affairs had taken. She had been inclined to feel some jealousy when she had first heard in July that Alie had succeeded in getting into Rumbold, but now she began to feel almost an affection for Alie. She even began to forgive Cyril for having asked Alie to sit in front with him and Alie for having complied. After all, it was much more comfortable to have the seat to herself and to let Nigger, the black pom, sit on the seat which he always loved so, did n't he? ("We call him 'Nigger' because he is so black, you know.")

Mrs. Pethwick, her double chin sunk in fox fur which rested on the generous swell of her russet-silk-clad bosom, leaned back on grey Bedford cord and watched the world go by through the windows of the saloon car. There was no sound in that stuffy interior which smelt, as did its mistress, of Parma violets, except the faint hum of the engine, which was more an oppression of the eardrums than an actual sound. Men passed the windows talking with moving lips but voicelessly, as they would on a cinema screen. Other cars passed, their passing hardly noticeable to Mrs. Pethwick. She looked out on to the apple orchards where a few apples still clung unpicked to the branches and where piles of apples in gold and scarlet

heaps waited carting to be turned into cider. Nigger, his forepaws on the window ledge, yapped excitedly at a sheep collie trotting by the roadside. The sheep collie heard nothing and paid no attention.

"Stop it, Nig," said Mrs. Pethwick. Then taking him by the scruff of his neck she nursed him, resisting, on her broad lap. Behind her swung and bobbed a sophisticated doll with long slim legs and blonde hair dancing enticingly to onlookers through the back window.

In front of her, separated from her by a sheet of glass, Cyril and Alie sat very close together, Cyril's head bent toward her as he drove. Alie's profile showed laughing, a laugh of which Mrs. Pethwick could hear no sound, but she regarded her niece indulgently. She had had to sacrifice nothing to her, and indeed she might be considered to have gained. Shut Compton went by; black-and-white Elizabethan cottages leaning into the road mingled with red-brick Caroline standing aloof in gardens hedged with clipped yew; the church, red sandstone with a tower. "The Talbot Inn — Hanleys Worcester Ales" slipped by almost unnoticed. "Rumbold three miles."

On the driving seat Alie, in her element, laughed with Cyril. Both brothers had wished to drive her over, but Gerald had had to go to Birmingham on business for his father's office, and Cyril, floridly good-looking, had managed to get the afternoon off because someone had to drive the car and Griggs was down with one of his bronchial colds.

The car swung through the village of Rumbold,

turned sharply left, and between brick gateposts entered the drive. A man was sweeping leaves, oak and chestnut, into little piles, scraping them up with wooden boards into a barrow to wheel them off to be burned. The tussocks of grass were just tipped with brown, touched by last night's frost. The car passed Hugh in riding breeches and gaiters walking in from the stables with Judy, the spaniel black and sleek, her nose as close as she dared to his heels.

Alie leaned out of the car to wave at him as they passed. Hugh waved back. His step quickened. The car swept by him, turning right-handed through a second pair of gateposts into the garden with its heavy cedars and beeches, leaving Hugh looking after it at the sophisticated blonde doll bobbing and curtseying at him on its elastic through the back window.

Hugh knocked out his pipe on his heel, patted Judy's head, and cut across the lawn to the house.

Indoors Mrs. Peel stood to welcome them. She had hoped that Alie would come alone, and it depressed her a little as from the window she watched Mrs. Pethwick step from the car, a massive figure in rust-red taffeta, tottering a little on feet stuffed unwillingly into black patent-leather shoes. Alie stood talking to Cyril as he removed gloves, cap, and tan leather coat and flung them into the driving seat. Arthurs passed through the hall to open the door.

She returned in a moment.

"Mrs. Pethwick, Miss Cross, and Mr. Cyril Pethwick, m'm," she said.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Peel collectively, shaking hands individually.

"Oh, how *do* you do, dear Mrs. Peel?" said Mrs. Pethwick. "I am so grateful for the dear child's sake that you were able to ask her over. It is *so* kind of you — and where is Miss Peel? And Hugh? I have heard so much of him from Alie that I must call him Hugh."

"Won't you sit down?" asked Mrs. Peel, assuming, possibly rightly, that the questions required no answer. Mrs. Pethwick made as if to sit.

"But is this your favorite chair? I would n't take it for anything if it were. I mean to say, you see," she said, rising again, although she was longing to seat herself and take her weight off the quite inadequate soles of her shoes. They were new and much too small, but they were the size she had worn as a girl, and she could not bear to admit that it was time to put off childish things.

"My husband — Mr. Pethwick, you know," she went on, "can't bear to have anyone take his favorite chair, and he is always telling the boys that it must be kept for him. I remember when dear Lady Simmons came to call — you know, the wife of Sir Henry Simmons, who gave the new wing of the infirmary — she is a great friend of mine — I mean to say, she sat in his chair, and poor Mr. Pethwick simply can't bear for anyone to do that, because if he sits too near the window the draught gets on to his neck, and he can't bear to sit with his back to the door. Well, I mean, he had to sit somewhere else or stand, and he stood all the

afternoon, because you can't ask Lady Simmons to go and sit somewhere else, can you?"

"No, I suppose you can't," said Mrs. Peel, who felt as if she would drown in the stream of words, which must be diverted at any cost.

"And how are you, my dear?" she said, turning to Alie, who was sharing the sofa with Cyril.

"Oh, the dear child is so well — indeed, I have never known her so well," gushed Mrs. Pethwick. "I was only telling Lady Simmons the other day — and she agreed with me, I know — that girls to-day don't look as well as they did when we were young — they are so thin — but they really are, you see. Oh, how do you do?" she said offering a white-gloved hand to Hugh as he came into the room. "I 've heard so much about you from Alie that I am dying to meet you. Alie says that you have taken her out to dance several times. Are you fond of dancing?"

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Hugh.

"My boys are too — are n't you, Cyril? You know my son Cyril? He 's the eldest, and then Gerald is at home. It 's funny — their father can't bear dancing, but I always say it 's lucky we don't all like the same thing."

"Have you seen Phyllis anywhere, Hugh?" asked Mrs. Peel.

"No, I have n't, I 'm afraid; but I expect she 'll be in soon. She walked in to Rumbold to order some more dog biscuit," Hugh replied.

"Well, I think you might ring, Hugh, please, and we 'll ask Arthurs to bring us some tea," said Mrs. Peel.

As Hugh crossed the hall to ring the bell he saw Phyllis standing rigid and still at the top of the stairs. Her arms were tense by her sides, her hands clenched, and she was staring hard at the possible Canaletto.

"Why, hullo, Phyll, there you are," he blurted out. "Come on down to tea."

Phyllis started and looked down at him, a smile coming mechanically to her lips as she said, "Why, of course, Hugh, I 'll come at once. I must just go back to my room to fetch a handkerchief." And with that she turned and ran up the passage, leaving Hugh staring up the stairs.

Tea was brought, and with it Phyllis entered the room. She greeted Alie almost effusively and sat down by her on the broad sofa.

"It 's wonderful to see you back here again," she said. "And what a pretty frock you have on."

"Oh, it 's only a cheap one," said Alie, looking distastefully at Phyllis's well-cut brown tweed. "It was quite cheap, really," and her hands pulled down the skirt in a quick gesture. Why should she always feel inferior to Phyllis, she wondered.

Alie, cut off from both Hugh and Cyril, was at a loss to find more to say.

"I hope that you are going to enjoy the next few days," Phyllis went on. "Of course you ride, don't you? I can mount you — or perhaps Hugh would like to do that; but both his horses are a little difficult."

"Oh yes, I can ride," said Alie. "I adore horses — don't you? But I have never had a chance to have one of my own."

"What bad luck. And there is a shoot to-morrow. We all go out with the guns," Phyllis went on, realizing against her will that she was breaking her resolution to be nice to Alie and was trying instead to clip her wings — in a very clumsy way.

"I 'd like to have you come over and see us some day, old man," Cyril was saying. "Of course our house is n't anything like this, but we could show you some fun in Worcester that may not be as good as you 'd get in Town, but it 's awfully cheery."

"Thanks, I 'd love to," Hugh replied noncommittally.

"Then we could get some awfully cheery girls and dance. Alie 's a little sport like that, is n't she? We were out last night," he went on, "and, good lord, she was drinking cocktails like a man! I had an awful head on me this morning, but she was as fit as anything at breakfast."

"No, thank you, dear Mrs. Peel, not another sandwich. I like them, but they don't like me, as Lady Simmons said to me the other day. I thought it so amusing of her. I offered her some crab sandwiches. Not tinned crab, — I never have tinned things in my house, because I always say the best is the cheapest in the end, — but real nice fresh crab. 'I like them,' she said, 'but they don't like me.' "

"Well, do have a little more tea, then. Hugh dear, pass Mrs. Pethwick that plate of biscuits. I think you will find that they suit you perfectly."

Hugh rose and passed the plate, glad to get away from Cyril, whose conversation seemed to be confined

to cliché and smutty *double entendre* dealing with the cheery girls of himself and his friends. Hugh felt as if he could kick him for including Alie in that category. Alie a "sport" and a "cheery kid"! Lord, what a bounder!

Hugh went and stood with his back to the fire and listened to Phyll and Alie talking on the sofa under the cover of Mrs. Pethwick's booming. She had got on to a recent visit to Paris with her family.

"Of course, my boy Gerald speaks French like a linguist, because he was on the Intelligence Staff in the War. We all stayed in the same hotel, and I used to tell the boys they could go out at night, but I told Mr. Pethwick that wherever he could go to I could too. But you know what the French are, and there were a lot of places which he would not take me to because they were too naughty or because Gerald said they were all in French and we could n't understand well. Mr. Pethwick is a very quiet gentleman himself — but then, as I always say, we can't all be noisy, can we? And I used to stay in the hotel with Mr. Pethwick. He turned on the portable radio we had got with us, and we heard London and Daventry almost as good as if we were in our own drawing-room at home!"

"Of course, you have n't seen your father since you were a child, have you?" asked Phyllis. "That must be awful. Does n't your father ever come home on leave?"

"No," Alie replied. "He says he is too busy. My mother came home once just after the War, but she said Daddy could n't come."

"That is rather hard," Phyllis went on. "When was he last at home?"

"I don't know exactly," said Alie, "but I should think — oh, I don't really know, and I should n't like to say."

"How did he meet your mother? I suppose that he must have met her in England somewhere, because Mrs. Pethwick's family were never in India, were they?"

"No — yes — I mean, I don't think so. I think Daddy met Mother in Bombay in a law court."

"How amusing," said Phyllis. "Of course your father is a lawyer, is n't he? But how funny to meet a girl in a law court in Bombay! Your mother seems to have gone out to India awfully young."

Hugh looked down at Alie and saw that her hands were nervously plucking at her gloves in her lap, and then he caught her eyes, which were hunting desperately for his. Phyllis was watching Alie — she knew that she had her down, and she intended that she should stay down. Alie knew it too, and that there was no mercy for her in those blue eyes with the hard light in them. Though Phyllis's voice had a note of honey sweetness in it, Alie saw that she was fighting for Hugh with the buttons off the foils.

Alie, having caught Hugh's eye, jumped to her feet. "Oh, Hugh," she said, "it 's too fine an afternoon to waste sitting indoors. Please take Cyril and me down to see the darling horses. He loves horses — he 's always reading the racing news in the papers."

"Yes, you had better go," said Phyllis rather grimly,

deciding to bide her time. "I think I 'll stay indoors, if you don't mind."

"Yes, all right," said Mrs. Pethwick, "but don't keep my boy Cyril too long, because we must be back in Worcester by half-past five to give Daddy his tea. Mr. Pethwick simply can't bear it if I am not there to give him his tea when he gets back from his office. Are n't you going out with the others?" she went on, turning to Phyllis.

"I don't think so," Phyllis replied. "Hugh can show them down to the stables. They should be back in ten minutes."

"Well, as I was saying, Mrs. Peel," Mrs. Pethwick continued, "when I went to Paris I saw so many people in mourning I thought there must be something wrong with the water or something, but Mr. Pethwick said not. Have you ever been to Paris, Miss Peel?"

"Yes, I love Paris," said Phyllis.

"Well, I don't suppose your mother lets you go alone, does she?"

"Oh, yes," Phyllis replied, "whenever I want to. You see, she does n't care for Paris much herself."

"Oh, well, you girls do these things nowadays. But there are some things in Paris I would n't let a girl of mine see; and, as Lady Simmons says, there are a lot of things you can see and hear for yourself which you would n't let a young girl see. Now there 's one thing I saw which I would tell your mother here, I mean to say, but I could n't tell it before you."

"Oh, I don't think you need mind about that," said Mrs. Peel. "Phyllis can hear and see anything I can.

But there are a lot of things I hear which I would rather not. Are those the others outside?"

"Yes, I think they are," said Mrs. Pethwick. "If I 'm to get back to give Mr. Pethwick his tea I really shall have to go now. Good-bye, Mrs. Peel; and thank you *so* much. I hope we shall see you in Worcester soon." She tottered to the door.

"What an awful woman," Phyllis remarked when she came back.

"Poor thing," said Mrs. Peel.

CHAPTER IX

JUDY lay in front of the log fire whimpering in her sleep. Her paws twitched and her nose wrinkled in excitement. Phyllis in brown tweed sitting in one of the deep chairs touched her with her foot. Judy woke with a start, got up and paddled across to where the pale November sun cast a patch of light on a faded Kermanshah rug. She turned around twice, scratched at the nap of the rug, fell with a flop, and with a deep sigh went to sleep again.

The truth was that Judy was getting old. Hugh had gone riding and had left her at home. After making a purely formal protest, she had gone back to the house to sleep away the morning until he should return. Judy was used to resigning herself these days.

Phyllis sat pretending to read. She sat, as usual, with her brown-brogued feet curled under her in the big chair, her head resting on her hand. The book lay open on her knees, but did not receive much attention. Her eyes would wander to the flames from the ash log in the fireplace. She even knew which tree it had come from, the old ash tree which had stood in a corner of the paddock, and she remembered the days of discussion she had with Hugh as to whether it should be felled. There had been no Alie in their lives in those days, a year ago. Every time they passed the

tree they had questioned whether it should come down, for neither of them liked to lose trees. The wind one blustering October night had settled the matter for them. Phyllis remembered the piles of damp leaves stripped the night before, the long grass in the orchard sodden with the rain, and the scattered apples and pears — juicy Williams, Blenheim Oranges, and russets carpeting the ground. The wind on her face, she went through the paddock to find the old ash down.

Ash burns well, silently, with a clear hot flame. There was no sound in the house except Judy's snoring. In the morning room her mother was writing letters alone — she had innumerable letters to write to people she scarcely ever saw, old friends who were never allowed to go out of her life.

Phyllis felt nervous and excited. For three days Alie had avoided her and she had not been able to have a word with her alone — and Phyllis was determined to have things out with her. She could not go on with this dreadful uncertainty. For three days Alie had kept under cover of Hugh, never leaving him for an instant when there was a chance of an encounter with Phyllis. Hugh, too, seemed to have sought Alie, and Phyllis felt that she had hardly seen him since Alie had arrived.

Phyllis looked at the clock. It was half-past eleven and Alie must come down soon. On the first day of her arrival Alie had snatched at the offer of breakfast in bed; she had retained the privilege, and no one ever saw her before the middle of the morning. To-day

Phyllis might be supposed to be out with Hugh, and she hoped to find Alie alone.

Phyllis heard a door shut upstairs. Her heart almost stopped beating and she found her mouth curiously dry. She took hold of herself with all her will power and sat very still in her chair. Her face was set. To anyone coming down the stairs the hall would have seemed empty except for Judy snoring lightly in the patch of sunlight on the faded Kermanshah rug.

There was a step on the landing above, and Phyllis pictured Alie coming down the dusk of the passage — what absurdity would she wear to-day? A scent of Turkish tobacco took her nostrils. Alie was coming down the stairs, and Phyllis saw sharply drawn in her mind the oak newel posts, the possible Canaletto, and Alie, cropped, waved, and powdered, stepping like a kitten, one foot and then the other, cautiously looking round the hall, as she came down the broad shallow staircase.

Phyllis sat still as death. She knew that Alie must be allowed to come well into the hall before she showed herself, and she awaited her with a subtlety and craft foreign to her habit.

Phyllis stood up and turned to face Alie. Alie stopped dead, the smoke curling from the cigarette in a long amber holder between her fingers. Phyllis's face was hard and white, Alie's eyes frightened and wandering, her cheeks paler than usual. Phyllis eyed her with distaste. She hated her as she had never imagined she could hate anyone. She despised the loose orange-tinted lips and the cropped black hair. At

any other time she would have thought it funny, but now she loathed the absurdity of the knitted silk sports frock which fitted so closely the swell of the tiny breasts, the openwork silk stockings and the high-heeled lizard-skin shoes. It all seemed so out of place in the hall at Rumbold, and Phyllis wondered what her father would have thought.

"Oh, hulloa," Alie said. "I thought you had gone out with Hugh."

"Yes, I know you did, and that is why I stayed in," Phyllis replied. She had not meant to say anything like that, but the words had come unsought to her lips. She took hold of herself, for above all she must retain her dignity.

Alie recovered herself.

"I felt sure you must be out on a fine day like this," she said, coming forward to the fire. "Poor little me, I get so tired doing all these outdoor things — otherwise I 'd have loved to have been out too."

"I don't think you need to pity yourself," Phyllis said, and she felt a surge of anger rise inside her which submerged everything else.

"Look here, Alie, this can't go on any longer."

"What can't?" said Alie, who was beginning to feel more sure of herself, for she knew that Phyllis in this state was less dangerous than Phyllis cool and normal.

"I have got to know how you stand as regards Hugh," Phyllis went on, ignoring the question.

"Oh, have you?" said Alie, smiling. "I don't see why. And in any case, had n't you better ask Hugh about that, if it is your business at all?"

Phyllis knew that whatever advantage she had had was now in Alie's hands. There was nothing else for it. She decided to deal with the matter bluntly.

"Does Hugh know that you have Indian blood in you?" she asked.

Alie's eyes fell.

"Who said I had?" she asked.

"Well, have you told him?" Phyllis said relentlessly.

"But I have n't," Alie said defiantly.

Phyllis paused a moment, then said, "Don't lie to me. I know you have. You can admit it to me. You have, have n't you?"

"No," said Alie. Then her eyes met Phyllis's and the answer was forced from her word by word. "Yes, I mean. Yes. I know I have." Then, with an attempt at gayety, "But even if I have, what of it? What 's that got to do with it?"

"Well, then, you have n't told Hugh, have you?"

"No, I have n't," said Alie defiantly. "No, I have n't told Hugh, and I don't see why I should, either. It 's got nothing to do with him, nor with you either."

"Don't talk nonsense," Phyllis said. "Of course it has to do with Hugh. Anyone can see that you are playing with him. I don't for a moment think that you care for him; I don't think you have it in you. But anyone can see that he would do anything for you. You have got round him somehow, and it is up to you to tell him."

"But I don't see that," said Alie, lighting a fresh cigarette. "If Hugh cares for me, that is his lookout. Do you care for him?"

Phyllis went white.

Alie laughed a curt little laugh. "Oh, anyone can see you do. How old-fashioned you are to have a pash like that. You 've had all this time to do what you liked with him, and you could n't do anything. The truth is, Phyllis, you 're too slow, and you must n't grudge me my fun now."

"Do you care for Hugh?" asked Phyllis.

"Yes, of course I do. He 's an old dear," Alie replied.

They heard the side door slam as they stood facing each other, and Hugh's footsteps in the library.

"Well, then, you must tell him the truth about yourself," Phyllis said. "If you don't, I shall."

Alie looked startled.

"Oh, you would n't do that!" she said. "Why, it will spoil everything!" And her eyes filled with tears.

"Possibly," said Phyllis, shrugging her shoulders, "but he has got to know. You can't go on under false pretenses."

Phyllis looked at Alie. She hated her no longer. She was tired in mind and body. She despised Alie, and she despised Hugh for looking twice at her.

"Don't be silly," she said roughly. "Either you must tell him or I shall."

Alie lost control. There were tear streaks on her cheeks, and she gestured and chattered before Phyllis, hardly intelligible in her anger. "I think you 're awful," she almost screamed. "Just because you can't get a man you won't let anyone else have him in peace. I 'll bet Hugh found you too cold and too damned

well-bred. Hugh 's a man, and men like girls who are peppy and sports. I 'll go tell him now, and you 'll see what will happen." And she ran across the hall to the library door. She stopped a moment, almost calm again, to look in the mirror, to powder and to touch up her lips. She opened the door and entered.

Phyllis stood blankly in the hall. What had she done? It was n't a bit what she had intended. Hugh could n't ever care for that little micky with the orange lips and greasy black hair. Well, if he wanted her, he could have her. And Phyllis dropped into the chair again. Her book lay open on her knees, but she did not read.

CHAPTER X

HUGH was sitting at the big library table writing when Alie entered. His cap and whip lay across a chair, and his legs in canvas gaiters were thrust out straight under the table. His back was to her, and he did not look up, but went on writing busily. He did not see the little smile on her face as she closed the door, nor did he see the tiny pointed tongue slide round the orange lips.

Hugh looked up, and Alie, her eyes still wet with tears, stood with her back to the door looking at him. Hugh rose to his feet.

"What on earth 's the trouble, Alie?" he asked, surprised.

"Oh, Hugh, I don't know how to tell you," she said with a catch in her voice, as she bravely choked down a sob.

Hugh went over to the door and put his arm gently over Alie's shoulders.

"Come over to the fire," he said, "and tell me what the matter is. I know that there has been something wrong since you have been here, and we had better have it out, and then you 'll feel better." And he led her unresisting to the fire. "Now, what 's the matter?"

Alie was standing close to him with her head bent.

"Oh, Hugh, it 's so awful. I don't know how to tell you," she faltered. "At least, I don't think it 's a bit awful, but Phyllis made it sound so." Her fingers strayed to the lapel of his coat and started to play with his buttonhole.

"You see, I went to Phyllis to ask her advice about something, and she made it seem horrid."

"Oh, I don't think Phyllis meant to, probably," said Hugh. "It is n't a bit like her, you know. She 's the nicest and kindest person really, and I am sure she did not mean to make you feel unhappy."

Alie lifted a tear-stained face.

"Oh, but, Hugh, she did — I know she did," she said. "She was awful to me. I thought she was my friend and that I could trust her to be nice to me, but when I told her she said the most awful things to me. Oh, I am so unhappy now!"

"Oh, come, Alie," said Hugh, putting his hands on her shoulders, "If Phyllis did say anything you did n't like I 'm sure she did n't mean anything horrid. You can trust her absolutely. She 's the straightest and kindest-hearted person I know. She 'd never let you down whatever you had done or whatever had happened."

"Oh, Hugh, now you 're being awful to me, just like Phyllis. Oh, I wish someone could understand."

Hugh laughed.

"Don't be silly," he said, giving her a little shake. "But what is the trouble anyway? It can't be anything very bad."

"No, it is n't — at least, I have never thought so

until I asked Phyllis whether I ought to tell you." And then Alie's voice broke. "She said that I was a liar and had come here under false pretenses."

"Oh, Alie, she can't have said that. Are n't you pitching it a bit strong?"

"But she did. I swear she did. Won't even you believe me?" And she lifted her brimming eyes to Hugh's.

"Why, of course I do, Alie, if you say so. But what is the trouble anyway?"

"Well, you see, it was like this," she said, hiding her face again. "You see, my great-grandfather who was killed in the Mutiny — oh, years ago — married an Indian girl — a rajah's daughter or something. Anyway, she was quite high up. My mother told me. And because my great-grandmother was an Indian, Phyllis thinks I have lied to you. It is n't so very awful, is it?"

She dropped her head on his shoulder and her shoulders shook. Hugh held her to him as he would a hurt child.

"Well, that 's not so very bad," he said, laughing.

"And I was going to tell you anyhow. I went to ask Phyllis how I should say it, and she said the most awful things to me — "

"No, it 's not a bit bad, and I can't understand Phyllis at all," said Hugh. "It is n't a bit like her."

"It is n't bad, is it?" said Alie, looking up. "It won't make any difference to us, will it?"

"No, of course it won't," said Hugh warmly. "Why should it? It 's got nothing to do with you

— and, in any case, I hate all these racial feelings. What your ancestors did is nothing to me. You are all I come in contact with, and I don't care about anything beyond that."

"Don't you really care, Hugh?" said Alie.

"No, of course I don't, Alie. I don't care a scrap what other people say or think about you. I know you too well."

"Oh, Hugh," she sighed, "and do you really care for me like that?"

Hugh looked down at her. In her eager upturned face so close to his own he sensed for the first time something artificial in the situation. He grew suddenly shy. "Why, of course I care," he replied uncomfortably.

Alie stood looking up at him with brimming eyes and drooping mouth, thinking that now at least he must kiss her. Surely she must have broken through his reserve. She wondered how he would kiss her — whether he would take her slowly or snatch what she so temptingly offered. She was poised to accept either gracefully. Hugh made no move. Alie held it a second longer, but nothing happened.

"Oh, what fun you are, Hugh," said Alie, seizing his hand and laughing with hilarious gayety. "I think Phyllis was mean because she was jealous of my liking you so much."

The gong boomed through the house for lunch.

"Oh, there 's the gong," she said. "I must go and make myself look nice again." And she ran laughing from the room.

As her slight figure disappeared through the door, Hugh's feeling that she was the most helpless creature he had ever seen returned. How odd of Phyllis to behave like that, he thought. It was n't like Phyllis to say things like that. Poor Alie — how much looking after she needed. And, angry with Phyllis, he walked slowly to the door.

Hugh entered the hall. He found Phyllis sitting curled up in her chair. She looked up with a smile, hoping that he could not see her white face.

"Hullo, Hugh. Did you have a good ride?"

"Look here, Phyll," he said, a harsh note in his voice, "what have you been saying to Alie?"

His didactic tone jarred on her and set alight a little flame of anger in her brain.

"I don't know why I should answer you, Hugh, when you talk to me like that," she replied quietly, "but I should very much like to know what business it is of yours."

"Of course it is my business. Alie came to me in tears. It is n't like you a bit, but there are limits to what you can say to a person. And after all, she is a guest in the house."

"Well, are n't you in the same position?" Phyllis asked coolly. Hugh's face flamed scarlet and then turned pale.

"Yes, I am, Phyllis, but, speaking as an old friend, I think you went too far. She says you called her a liar and said she was here under false pretenses."

"And of course you believe every word she says, don't you, Hugh?"

"Yes, I do," said Hugh.

"Then why bother to come to me?" Phyllis asked.

"Because I won't have it," said Hugh. "I think it 's disgraceful to ask anyone here and talk to her like that."

Phyllis stood up and her eyes flamed in her pale face.

"Now look here, Hugh. You say you won't have it. Well, I won't, either. I won't have you using this tone to me and behaving like a rude little boy. You are too old and too nice for that. In any case, I think you owe me an apology."

They faced each other across the hearth rug, both angry. Phyllis wondered what had happened. She had never quarreled with Hugh in her life, and now all of a sudden they were going for each other in a dog-and-cat fight over Alie, of all people — Alie, who was n't worth a breath of either of them.

Phyllis turned to the fireplace and putting her elbows on the mantelpiece rested her head on her arms.

"Please let 's not be silly, Hugh. I think you had better go and wash for lunch."

"If I have been rude, I am sorry," said Hugh, "but I should be glad if you would do me the favor of not talking to Alie like that again." And he turned and walked to the stairs.

Phyllis wheeled about hot with anger, ran after him, and snatched him by the wrist. They stood face to

face again, their eyes blazing, neither prepared to give in.

"Hugh," she said in a low voice, "you are acting like a baby. If you think you can talk to me like this, you are mistaken. I refuse to bicker with you about who said what. How you regard Alie is entirely your affair, but you might at least give me some credit for some sense. Sometime you may realize that I know what I am doing, but in the meantime I won't make my behavior a matter of critical discussion with you. I won't defend myself to you, of all people."

She let go his wrist and ran quickly up the stairs to her room. Hugh, hands thrust deep in his pockets, walked back into the library knowing that he had made a fool of himself.

CHAPTER XI

FINE rain beat on her face as Phyllis jogged along the narrow muddy lane. Just ahead of her the first whip, crouching a little to the wind and rain, rose in his saddle to the trot of his horse. The quarters of his chestnut mare moved with a sturdy impersonal action, and the couples jingled on the cantle of his saddle. Jog, jog, jingle, jingle.

Ahead of him the hounds trotted, sterns waving, nosing into the hedges on either side, scenting the wind, watching with wise eyes the huntsman and master at their head. The whip turned in his saddle and grinned back at Phyllis, his white teeth gleaming in his wizened brown face.

"A fine scenting day, miss," he said. "If once we can get away from Shot Wood towards Farlow. The country is not — leave it, Pilot; coop, Marksman — so blind out there." And he turned again to jog to the music of the couples.

Behind her followed the field. Phyllis always liked to be well up with hounds. Behind her somewhere was Hugh. Hugh who was leaving to-morrow for India — with Alie. The wind and rain had whipped her face and given it color, but she felt nervous and desperate. Hugh seemed to have slipped from her; their old intimacy had gone, and she did not care

what happened. Alie had left Rumbold the afternoon before, and Phyllis had hardly seen Hugh alone since then. He had driven her out to the meet that morning, but their conversation had not gone beyond the weather and the chances for the day. As soon as hounds had moved, Hugh had left her.

Her bay pulled gently, mouthing at the bit, his ears cocked forward as he stepped daintily. There had been rain the night before, but not enough to make the lanes deep or the going heavy. Sodden leaves stripped from the trees filled the bottoms; overhead the clouds raced across the sky. There were patches of blue that foretold finer weather. In the field over the hedge a man was ploughing with two horses. "Giddup," he shouted as he came to the end of his furrow, then stopping his horses he leaned on the plough handles to watch the hunt go by. All he could see were the bobbing heads and jogging bodies. He touched his hat to the master and pulled the potato sack closer round his shoulders.

Hounds turned through a gate and crossed a field. The hunt spread across the grass. The whip cantered down the hedgerow skirting the wood. Hounds were thrown into the wood. Phyllis sat listlessly hunched on her horse and watched the field move by her to points of vantage. Hugh went by without a word — he did not see her, it is true, but to Phyllis it was the last straw. A wild longing came to her to do something desperate that would make him notice. Her horse fidgeted and tried to move with the rest. She dug at him savagely with her heels and jobbed at the

bit. He reared, and her knees closed automatically to the saddle. She eased the bit rein and quieted him, patting his neck.

She heard a whimper in the wood, then another and the huntsman's voice. She heard the whip's "Gone awaay" from the far side of a cover, a crash of music, the clear note of the horn, and hounds went streaming out into the open on the far side of the copse. They were away towards Paxstowe. Phyllis gathered her reins and settled into the saddle to ride.

Most of the field had plumped for a break toward Farlow and were as badly placed as she was. She rode a line of her own down a ten-acre pasture, over a brook running full at the bottom, with treacherous crumbling banks. Hounds were running in a packed body to her left front, with only the huntsman and the master, conspicuous on his grey, within a field of her. As Phyllis went up the hedgerow of a field of swedes she saw them disappear over the brow of the hill.

At the top of the hill a hedger, billhook in hand, opened a gate for her.

"They 're up away to Paxstowe and Poolend," he shouted as she went through. She crossed right-handed over the stubble, and a quickset hedge rose before her. She put her bay at it and made it without a touch. Over grass with sheep that gathered in a bunch to stamp and stare with wide eyes as she passed. Another hedge and into a grass-grown lane. She gave her horse his head and galloped between the hedges for a quarter of a mile and more, the turf

hard and sound under the flying hoofs. The lane turned sharp left and opened into pasture. There she found herself almost level with hounds, checked in the next field but one.

She pulled her horse to a walk and moved slowly down the hedgerow towards them. There was no one up except the master, the huntsman, and one or two others. She heard the horn as the pack were gathered for a cast right. She heard the huntsman's "Yooi in, Conflict; yooi in, Warrior," and Harlequin's note as the old tried hound found the line. Her horse cocked his ears at the sound. Phyllis let him out again across the grass.

As she rode she heard someone behind her and to her left. She looked over her shoulder as she rode. It was Hugh, his hat crammed down over his eyes, going hard. As soon as she saw him all the exhilaration went out of her and all the pain of the last few days returned. He came level with her, looking to neither right nor left, and to Phyllis came the thought that she must make Hugh notice her. She was desperate, and she touched the bay with her heels. The horse needed no urging, and she felt him gather his quarters under her and open into the full length of his stride. She saw Hugh, a blur of pink, falling behind her as she took a bullfinch and ditch without a pause.

Hounds had gone out of her head; she had ceased to trouble about the line; all she knew was that she must keep ahead of Hugh and show him — what, she neither knew nor cared.

Another hedge, old and treacherous, loomed up, and she did not trouble to steady the bay. The take-off was bad, and he slipped and floundered through. She felt the twigs brush her boots as they went, and they would have fallen had she not pulled him to his feet again by the head. On over a furrow heavy with the rain until, laboring, they reached a stretch of unploughed stubble. She touched in her heels, galloping for the hedge on the far side, the ground sloping downwards, giving her additional speed. She heard a confused cry behind her of " 'Ware wire," but she would not stop, for she saw hounds running fast, closely bunched, to her left again. Here was her chance — what should she care what happened? She would show Hugh.

Her face set and she settled into the saddle as the hedge rose before her, thick and black. As she rode a small square of red board appeared before her eyes. She checked her horse with the rein to collect him for the jump, then let him go with a touch of the heel. He rose, and as he did so she saw before her on the other side three thick new strands of wire stretched tightly on posts two yards out from the hedge. She felt the jar of the landing; there was a sudden check, a twang of wire, and she pitched neatly over her horse's head on the pasture beyond.

Phyllis was stunned for a second by the fall, and when she sat up she found the reins still in her hand. She rose slowly to her feet. Her bay was standing between the hedge and the wire, and she could see that he was bleeding profusely. He was standing

quietly, waiting to be released from the entangling broken strands. Luckily he had not started to kick.

Phyllis climbed slowly over the broken top strand. No words of hers could tell what she felt. She had done what she had done in a moment of madness. She must have been mad to act like a melodramatic little fool. Her first thoughts were for her horse. Even the most cursory examination showed him to be badly cut. With luck he might not be permanently damaged, but at best the cuts would leave a blemish for the rest of his life. As she bent to run an exploring hand down his legs, Phyllis heard Hugh's voice from the other side of the hedge with a note of anxiety in it that cheered her for a moment, but immediately her sick depression returned. She had made a thorough fool of herself, and ruined her horse.

"Phyll, Phyll," Hugh shouted, "are you all right?"

Phyllis looked up.

"Yes, I 'm all right, thanks awfully, Hugh. You go on. You must n't miss this for anything. Have you got your wire cutters? I 'll get out of this mess alone."

"Don't be silly, Phyll," said Hugh. "I 'll come round in a minute — there 's a gate just up the field. Have you damaged him?"

"I 'm afraid so," Phyllis replied, and she found it hard to make her voice say the words steadily. If only Hugh would go on being nice to her. She did n't deserve it — she did n't deserve anything but a kicking. She watched Hugh canter up the field, stop at

the gate, and fumble with his whip at the latch. He cantered towards her, dismounted and loosened his girths, then dropping his reins over his horse's head he left him to stand.

"Useful trick, that, Phyll. I always said you should teach yours to stand," he grinned at her. He fumbled at his hip and unhooked his knife with the wire cutters from his belt.

"Good Lord," he said, "he is in a mess, is n't he?" And he set methodically to work to cut the strands of wire one by one. Phyllis stood holding the horse by the head and watched him at work kneeling in the muddy sodden grass at her feet. She found herself trembling and weak at the knees. Hugh cleared the last strand and straightened up.

"That 's right," he said. "Now lead him out and let 's have a look at him."

The bay, already beginning to feel stiff, hobbled out, and Hugh ran an appraising hand over his chest and legs.

"H'm," he said. "Long cut on chest, not very deep. One inside the off elbow — I wonder how he got that. One just above the chestnut on the near side, and a few scratches just above the pastern. That 's that infernal top strand whipping about. Phyll, I 'll bet you don't know what the ingot and the ergot are. Hullo, and one on the near stifle. Looks awful, but I don't think there 's anything really very much wrong. Poor old man!

"Phyll," he went on, "whatever on earth did you do it for? You must have heard me shouting, and

I can't think how you did n't see the board. I knew you were riding for trouble."

Hugh looked up from the horse at Phyllis. Her face was set and very white, and she swayed as she stood with the bridle in her hand at the horse's head.

"I think I should like to sit down," she said, and her head fell forward as she collapsed.

Hugh ran to her and picked her up. She was limp and her eyes were half shut; the breath came very slowly through her open lips. There was a streak of mud across her cheek, and her hair escaping from under her hard hat clung to the dead white of her cheek. Hugh loosened the stock at her neck and taking off his coat wrapped it round her, then holding her in his arms as he knelt he pushed her head forward between her knees. It was the only thing he remembered as the right thing to do with people who fainted.

Phyllis in the warmth of his coat came back to consciousness in his arms. She pushed at him feebly with her hand.

"Oh, leave me alone, Hugh, leave me alone," she said weakly. "Oh, please leave me alone." She felt the life coming back to her through Hugh's muscular arms, and she wanted him to hold her like that forever, but her dignity would not let her. She sat up and then stood. "Oh, and I 've got your coat, too. You 'll get awfully cold.

"I 'm all right now, Hugh," she said rather shakily. "You go on now. I can find my way back."

"Rot!" said Hugh, putting on his coat again over his wet shirt sleeves that clung to his arms. "Let 's go home. We 're only half a mile from the car. Look here, get up on Gander, and I 'll lead the bay."

He went to his own horse, which was standing as he had been left, quarters to the wind, head down, and resting his off hind. He tightened the girths again and shortened the stirrup leathers.

"Here you are, Phyll, up you get."

"Oh, Hugh, I can't. I 've ruined your day for you. I feel so awful about it."

"Don't talk nonsense, Phyll. I had all the best of the run. Come, up you get." And she got unresisting into the saddle. He took the bay's bridle and walked at her knee as they crossed the fields back to the inn where they had left the car.

Hugh handed both horses over to a groom.

"Here," he said to Phyllis, "you go in to the fire and get warm, and I 'll tell Peters about the bay. Order yourself a cherry brandy, and one for me. It 'll do us both good."

He followed Peters into the yard. In ten minutes he was back.

"Come on, Phyll," he said, "let 's go if you 're ready. There 's nothing much wrong with the bay. We 've washed the cuts and put on some iodine. They don't look nearly so bad now the blood is off. I expect you 'll be riding him again before Christmas."

"You are a brick, Hugh," said Phyllis. "I 'd love to look at him now to see how he is."

"Oh, that 's all right, Phyll. Don't bother. He 'll

be all right, and you had much better come along home."

Phyllis protested no more, and he followed her out to the car.

He helped her on with her coat and tucked a rug in round her feet.

"Are you going to be warm enough?" he asked. "You 'd better keep really warm. Here, take my scarf." And he put his thick woolen muffler round her neck.

Phyllis sat back in the warmth of her coat and watched Hugh's face under the brim of her hat. She felt tired and stiff after her fall. She knew that she had made a fool of herself, and was miserable at what she had done. She counted the items. She had spoiled Hugh's day. She had damaged her horse. She had, above all, made an ass of herself in Hugh's eyes. It was all her fault — she had asked Hugh to be nice to Alie and had invited Alie to be nice to her. She watched Hugh's face as he drove. She loved the line of his thin brown cheek and the way his eyes puckered as he strained to see through the misted glass of the wet windshield. What was he thinking, she wondered. Of Alie, probably. The thought rioted in her mind. If he was, then let him. If he thought Alie worth while, that was his affair. Misery held her afresh.

Hugh slowed down and turned to her. She looked away quickly, hoping that he had not seen her looking at him.

"Phyll," he said, "I have an apology to make. I 'm

sorry I lost my temper with you the other day. I was quite rude. I hate to think that I said anything that hurt you."

Phyllis swallowed. She hoped that he could not see her face. In the pockets of her big coat her hands were clenched.

"That 's all right, Hugh," she said. "I did n't mind a bit, and I do understand. Let 's not talk about it any more."

"Thanks, Phyll," Hugh replied. "I knew you 'd understand." And the car shot forward again. They turned into a narrow lane and climbed a small hill. There was a farm on the left.

"Look out, Hugh," said Phyllis sharply. As she said it the car came to a jarring stop, for crossing the road was an old sheep dog. He moved slowly and questioningly over the muddy lane. Hugh touched the electric horn, and the old dog stopped and raised his eyes to the sound, wagging his tail. He was stone blind, and his pale sightless eyes searched for something in their direction. "Poor old man," said Hugh.

To Phyllis the old dog seemed like Hugh, hunting blindly through all the mess of Alie and herself. The tears smarted in her eyes and to Hugh's astonishment she began unrestrainedly to cry.

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

"VICTORIA, please," said Hugh as he got into his taxi at Paddington. The car, with a scream of gears, mounted the incline into Praed Street, and Hugh, feeling curiously elated, watched the movement of the streets. The air was sharp and the pale sunlight gave London the luminous, unreal appearance it sometimes attains in early spring. Hugh looked forward to new sights and sounds, to new contacts, to a fresh set of people with an unfamiliar outlook. He was prepared for disappointment, because he was old enough to know that Anglo-Indians were quite a normal set of people in real life, but as a boy he had soaked in Kipling, and Kipling's India still remained his standard. If every policeman was not to be a Strickland, — for even Kipling admitted he was something out of the way, — at least there might be someone who could meet the Indian on his own ground, speaking the dialects with undetectable accents and familiar with every custom. Hugh smiled. He was a romantic. He knew that Anglo-Indians were quite ordinary, and he repeated this to himself as if he were trying to recover from the illusion of a dream.

There would be men like McKenzie, straightforward, not too clever, living lives of their own, venturing into unfamiliar England once in three years.

Women like Mrs. McKenzie, divided between husband in India and children at home, tired of the ceaseless shuttle-weaving across the woof of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. There would be girls like Alie, who would enjoy a butterfly existence thrown suddenly into a world of men — a world, indeed, organized from top to bottom by men for themselves, in which women could play but a minor part.

The Park was green despite the month and the bare brown trees. Nursemaids in brown, blue, or black, children hippety-hopping on their morning walks, dogs tearing over the grass chasing the leaves, glad to be alive in the bright air — all spoke of the ordinary everyday life he felt that he was leaving. At once and for the first time it seemed odd to Hugh that Guardsmen could walk with girls, park keepers pick up paper, and everyone fulfill his ordinary daily function, on a day when people were leaving England for indefinite periods. He had a feeling that everyone ought to be noticing the red printed labels on his suitcases, "Cabin Marseilles–Bombay."

The taxi drew up at Victoria. Hugh tipped his driver a shilling and was wished "Good luck." He walked into the entrance hall of the station, coat over his arm. It was twenty to eleven. "P. & O. Special, sir?" asked his porter. "Platform 6." Following the man with his truck Hugh passed through the barrier to the platform at which the long train was drawn up. It tickled his senses to see in London the boards on the carriage, "P. & O. Special — Bombay Express."

He was in a different world. Outside over the bar-

rier men were checking tickets for the crowd of travelers to places to which one does travel from Victoria — Ramsgate, probably, or Maidstone, or Gravesend. Inside was India. Men predominated among those obviously traveling — men tall and short, fat and lean, all quite ordinary men, but by their clothes, their speech, their looks, proclaiming the East. The crowds to see them off struck a discordant note, but it was India all the same.

Hugh looked round for Alie. He had found his seat and hers, and he was to meet her at a quarter to eleven. He bought a *Times* and a *Field,* for being a Friday all the papers but *Punch* were new. He bought a *Sketch,* a *Tatler,* and a *Daily Mirror* for Alie, knowing that she preferred her literature in the form of pictures.

"Come on," said a voice in his ear, "*jeldi* with those suitcases. I 've found my *jagah.*"

"All right, sir, coming, sir," said the porter, not a whit disturbed, for at Victoria they are used to all the languages of the East and of the Continent.

As Hugh stared about him Alie touched his arm. She had had a hard time with Aunt Enid and Uncle Fred, and she had just managed after leaving them to compose her features from the sulky look they had worn all the morning to the pathetic little smile which she thought would tell on Hugh.

At breakfast that morning Alie had come down late, but earlier, it is true, than usual. Generally she found Uncle Fred shoveling marmalade on to toast, the *Daily Mail* in front of him, and Aunt Enid in a wrapper and

slippers pouring his coffee. To-day she found Uncle Fred standing reading his paper, his back to the fire, breakfast laid but untouched on the table, and Aunt Enid fully dressed.

"Well, young lady," said Uncle Fred jovially as she came in, "I 've got a surprise for you. I 've got a day off from the bank to see you off at Victoria. I told the manager that it is not often that one has a niece going off to India, and he said he thought he might possibly arrange to spare me for this one morning. Anyway, he knows I would n't ask such a thing on account of just anyone."

Uncle Fred derived a good deal of satisfaction from the feeling that he was indispensable at the bank, and every winter during his chronic attacks of asthma his wheezing coughs over a steaming inhaler were punctuated with words of concern for the welfare of the bank's business in his absence.

"Well, you need n't have bothered," said Alie, feeling at once that her morning was spoiled. It would never do to appear among all those people, judges and governors, generals and subalterns of cavalry regiments, with the handicap of relatives like finicky Uncle Fred with his glasses on the end of his nose and fat, dowdy Aunt Enid.

"Shall I go up and finish your packing for you?" asked Aunt Enid meekly. Her eyes were red-rimmed, for she had cried during the night, thinking of her girlie leaving them for the heat, the tigers, and the snakes of India, with all those black people always round you. There had been a nigger only the other

day who had come round begging. Aunt Enid had had a fit, as she told Uncle Fred afterwards, when he rolled the whites of his eyes at her and took his cap off his woolly pate, asking for work. Just to fancy that those sort of people would surround Alie was almost too much for her.

"Oh, all right," said Alie, rather grudgingly, sitting down to the table, "but you 'll have to hurry. And tell Lily I want an egg at once as you go." She helped herself to butter.

Aunt Enid left the room. She had been packing and unpacking for days under Alie's orders and supervision, and she had to confess that, fond as she was of the girl, she was just a little bit tired of it all. Aunt Enid was back in a minute.

"Alie dear," she said, "would you like me to put pyjamas or one of your new nightgowns into the suitcase for the train?"

"Oh, Aunt Enid," said Alie petulantly, cracking her egg with a spoon, "I 've told you at least a dozen times I want the nightgown, of course. Can't you ever do anything without being told at least a hundred times?"

"I 'm sorry, dear. You know I forget sometimes." Aunt Enid went wearily back to pick up the room, to sort out stockings fit to wear from a drawerful thrown in anyhow, and to squeeze out a sponge and pack powder so that the box would not burst.

They had at length left the house. Lily shut the door and went up to Alie's room to see if she could salve anything of value to herself from the

wreckage. She, at least, was not sorry to lose such an ornament to Pretoria Road.

It was nearly a quarter to eleven when they had arrived at Victoria. Alie was determined that they should not see her off on the platform. They stood in the hall talking for a moment, and Uncle Fred suggested a move to the train.

"Oh, I am sure they won't let you on the platform," Alie said. "In fact, I know they won't."

"Well, you 'll write us sometimes, won't you, dear," said Aunt Enid, "and tell us how you get on? Because, as I said to Uncle Fred only this morning, we are very fond of our little girlie."

Uncle Fred came back to them again. He had been away to make inquiries about getting on to the platform.

"I think I can manage to persuade them to let us on," he said. Uncle Fred was like that. He liked others to feel that he could manage things better than anyone else by some kind of private and personal influence.

"I have spoken to that ticket collector, and he says it can be done," he went on, omitting to tell them that he had purchased the right to go by putting two pennies into a slot and taking the two tickets delivered to him.

Aunt Enid, her eyes moist and still red-rimmed from her crying of last night, looked up at her husband with admiring eyes.

"That will be nice," she said. "Now we can all go on the platform, and I can put this" — indicating

a paper bag she carried — "into your seat, and you won't have to trouble to carry it at all yourself. It 's got a nice piece of pork pie in it, and some mutton sandwiches, and a bar of chocolate and a banana, just in case you get hungry on the journey."

Alie viewed the thoughtful gift with a look of frozen horror and imagined herself sitting with the bag on her knees eating mutton sandwiches and a banana in front of Hugh, the judges, the governors, and the cavalry officers.

"Oh, how stupid you are, Aunt Enid! I can't take a thing like that with me — it would look too awful. Just think what everyone would think if I started to eat out of a paper bag in front of all those people. Why, they would n't ever speak to me again."

"But I am sure they would n't mind you having a few sandwiches, dear," said Aunt Enid. "Anyway, I will carry it down to the train, and I am sure you can find a nice quiet corner to have them in, in the corridor, or" — in a whisper, looking round to see that Uncle Fred could not hear — "in the lavatory, perhaps."

"Well, come on, you two girls," said Uncle Fred jovially. "Come on. No more secrets in front of a gentleman. Let 's get aboard the lugger, and yo-ho for the ocean."

"Don't be silly, Uncle Fred," said Alie, her eyes wandering down the platform to make sure that no one noticed them. "I don't want to be seen off. I always hate it anyway."

"But, Alie dear, you won't mind your old auntie coming just this once, will you?" And the red-rimmed eyes filled with tears again, for Alie had been all the child she could ever have.

"Yes, I do mind," said Alie brutally. "Good-bye, Uncle Fred," she went on, offering her hand, her eyes still down the platform; and Uncle Fred found himself taking it, though this was not at all the farewell he had imagined when he asked Worthington's Ealing Branch manager for the day off. Aunt Enid threw her arms round Alie, who found herself resting on the stout satin bosom.

"Good-bye, dear," she sobbed. "Good-bye — and, dear, please write to us sometime, and have a good time, and good luck to you."

"Don't spot my frock," said Alie, unmoved; and then she gave her aunt a peck on the cheek. "Good-bye, Aunt Enid."

Aunt Enid's arms fell away and she looked up at Alie. Alie's eyes were interested in nothing but to see that as few people as possible saw her. Without a word she turned and walked down the platform, preparing her features for the meeting with Hugh. Aunt Enid stood mopping her eyes with an inadequate handkerchief, and Uncle Fred blew his nose and re-adjusted his pince-nez.

"Well, my dear," he said, "we had better take the Underground back."

They turned to leave the station. In Aunt Enid's hand was the paper bag, and in Uncle Fred's two-pennyworth of platform tickets.

CHAPTER II

HUGH, out of temper with the world, sat alone in his *wagon-lit* compartment and watched the landscape go by. The skies were grey and weeping, and Hugh felt tired after a restless night. The train had heaved and rolled across France, and the night had been punctuated by sudden stops and starts, regulated by the bleatings of tin horns. Hugh had tried to sleep, found it difficult, and had turned to a book. He had waked finally very early and had read again for an hour before the brown-uniformed attendant brought his early-morning coffee. He had spoken to the man in French and had received his reply in English. Indeed, had Hugh been Russian, German, Italian, or Spanish he would have received an idiomatic reply in his native tongue. Wagon-lit attendants and head porters are never quite at home in their own speech, and it is a point of honor with them never to be outdone.

Hugh had cut himself shaving, and he had a bad taste in his mouth. The train was descending the long steep gradient along the cliff, flicking in and out of tunnels, as it neared Marseilles. There was to come the grinding tour of the town until they should arrive with a breathless halt on the P. & O. berth where the *Cochin* lay ready to receive the mails.

Hugh was wondering how it had been done. They had met the McKenzies on board the boat at Folke-

stone. Alie had not appeared to know anyone else on board. Their wagon-lit compartments, already booked, were arranged, Hugh and Alie each in a single berth, with the McKenzies in a double berth next door. They had played a very mild game of bridge before tea, after which he and McKenzie had settled down to piquet until dinner. By dinner time Alie had picked up what seemed to Hugh a host of young men, and men who were not so young. There was a "Pugs" and a "Jock" and a "Phil," and they were all sitting on the bed in Alie's compartment when they were called for dinner by the attendant. They went down the narrow swaying corridor in a body, and Hugh found the strangers at the next table. Now he came to think of it, he realized that there were only three of them after all. During dinner there was a good deal of noise and exchange of wit between the tables. Hugh felt a little out of it.

After dinner he went back to piquet with McKenzie. They played till late. When Hugh eventually said "Good-night" and went to bed he could hear talk and a good deal of laughter through the partition. He tried to sleep and failed, and took to a book. When he did at last put out his light he could hear them still at it. He did not know what time the party had broken up.

Hugh was still turning over in his mind the problem of how Alie had done it when the attendant knocked and put in his head.

"Are you all ready, sir?" he asked. "The steamer in five minutes, I think. Thank you, sir, thank you,"

he went on as Hugh handed him a twenty-franc note. "Shall I call a porter, sir?"

"Yes, please. Is the young lady next door ready?" Hugh asked.

"I think not, sir," was the reply. "I went in a minute ago and I find she 'ave gone asleep again, but I 'ave woken her up now." And he disappeared.

Hugh went into the corridor and knocked at Alie's door. "Come," she said, and Hugh entered. Alie stood before the mirror.

"Oh, hullo. I thought it was one of the boys," she said, "but I expect their heads are too bad. But I 'm glad you 've come. Are we nearly in?"

"Yes," Hugh replied. "We 'll be in in a moment." He looked round the cabin. It was more disordered than anything he had ever seen. There was an open suitcase on the bed, and clothes and stockings littered the rest of the available space.

As he spoke the train stopped. They had arrived. Through the window Hugh could see the black side of the *Cochin* alongside the wharf, and he heard the shouting of porters in unintelligible French.

"Good Lord, I 'll have to hurry," she said, and picking up stockings, knickers, and nightgowns she crammed them anyhow into her suitcase. A box of powder fell to the floor and burst.

"Oh, damn!" Alie exclaimed. "But it does n't matter."

By the time the blue-bloused porters were in the carriage she was crushing down the lid of the suitcase. The locks snapped. She was ready.

CHAPTER III

HUGH, sitting in the sun, shut his book with a snap. To-morrow they would be in Port Said. To-day it was one of those glorious days of deep blue sea, shining sun, and breeze that sometimes come in the Southern Mediterranean in winter.

The awnings were not up. By P. & O. rule they would be rigged at Port Said, with complete regularity and disregard for the state of the weather. Simultaneously the stewards would appear in linen coats, the settees in the smoking room would adopt white covers, and the chairs in the saloon would be given little round cane seats in place of the tapestry upholstery of cooler latitudes.

Hugh sat up and looked down the length of the deck, whitely scrubbed. Forward, bells struck, musically echoed in the engine room. He looked at his watch — half-past eleven. Groups overcoated and rugged were taking the sun. Hugh wondered where Alie was. She did not get up till after breakfast, but she was generally about by this time. Two men passed walking quickly.

"— another round and it will be time to have a short one before tiffin."

A man and his wife exercised methodically, arm in arm, tramp, tramp, her skirts caught by the wind

against her thighs, his tie blown out of his coat, as they reached the top of the deck. A man went down the deck walking slowly, book under arm, by himself, seeing nothing, thinking nothing.

From the other side of the ship came the regular crack as rope quoits struck the deck, and the voice of someone calling the score in a tennis match. Hugh, feeling restless, laid his book down and rose. He walked forward and leaned over the rail. A quartermaster sat on the hatch cover watching another splice an eye into a wire for the cargo tackles. His hands passed the tarred yarn as he served his splice, and a tabby cat on her back in the sun played with the ends. They were laughing about something. An engineer tapped with a hammer on a winch. The carpenter was at work fitting a new piece into the rail top, the brown shavings of teak blowing across the deck as he lifted them on his plane. The shadows moved back and forth across the deck to the slight motion of the ship.

Hugh turned back and walked along the deck again, intending to go down to his cabin to put his book away and to fetch another. Sitting in a group were Mrs. McKenzie, knitting at a woolen stocking, a woman whose name he had gathered was Mrs. Greely, a girl he did not know but whom he believed to be her niece, and, sitting on the foot of her deck chair, one of the men whose acquaintance he had made in the train, "Phil" whatever-his-name-was — Hugh was not aware of ever having heard it, although he knew that he was in a firm in the Calcutta jute trade which

was reckoned among the aristocracy of the Indian mercantile world.

Hugh had already become more or less aware of the various strata comprising the social organization of India. In a country where changes were frequent and society highly organized, everyone was docketed with his occupation. It was from this that he must begin. If he could prove himself, well and good; but a man in the Indian Civil Service apparently gained a very considerable start, while one from the underworld of commerce was distinctly handicapped. There were, however, certain commercial firms that had established themselves high up in the social scale. They were accepted, Hugh understood. To say that a man was with one of these was to give him an entrée everywhere, and, although he was not esteemed as highly as a man in the Indian Civil Service, he was reckoned of more account than Police or Public Works, and certainly of more than Salt and Agriculture. The Army was, of course, a law unto itself. It had its own hierarchy, its own standards peculiar to itself. Over all, Simla stood patronizingly aloof, with its intimate gossip of His Excellency's peculiar foibles.

Hugh was going to pass the group, when Mrs. McKenzie hailed him.

"Come and sit down, Hugh. Alie says that you play the piano awfully well, and we were wondering whether we should try to get up a concert party."

"I 'm afraid that I don't play much," Hugh re-

plied — "only to amuse myself, and not the kind of things that anyone else wants to hear."

"Oh, rot!" said Phil. "If you can play at all, that is all we want. Mrs. Greely sings, and so does Mrs. McKenzie, and we thought that Pat and I could dance and do some gagging." "Pat" Hugh took to be the girl.

"No, I 'm afraid I should be no good at that kind of thing. Anyway, I would much rather be one of the audience than one of the party. I have never played in public in my life," Hugh lied glibly.

"Oh, please do — be a lamb, Hugh," said Pat. "I 'm sure you would do it wonderfully."

"No," said Hugh determinedly, "I don't think I could."

"Oh, well," Mrs. McKenzie said, "we won't bother you now, but you 'll have to do it in the end. Are you going ashore at Port Said?"

"I expect so," said Hugh. "Everyone does, don't they?"

"I don't suppose I shall. It is quite a dull place, you know," Phil said indulgently, speaking from the experience of two visits. "I can't think why it is supposed to be so wicked. I have never found anything wicked there, and I always look for it everywhere I go."

"I expect you are very naughty, are n't you?" asked Mrs. Greely, turning wide blue eyes upon him.

"Oh, well — " Phil replied modestly, and, unable to avoid wondering if she was trying to make a fool of him, he decided to change the subject. "But I

should n't buy anything there if I were you, Ranken. Everyone does, you know, his first time out; but I should n't."

"I don't intend to," Hugh replied; "I don't think I want anything."

"But you are going to get a fancy dress for the dance, are n't you? Or have you got one on board?" asked Pat.

"Well, I was n't and I have n't," said Hugh.

"Oh, but you must," came a chorus. "Of course you must. You are at our table, and everyone at our table has simply got to come in something."

"Oh, well, I suppose I must, then. I 'll get a false nose or something."

Phil whatever-his-name-was picked up Hugh's book and read the title idly.

"Good Lord!" he said, dropping it. "Are you really reading this? I did n't know anyone read that kind of thing except highbrows and government officials."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Greely.

"*Democracy and the Future of India,* by — what 's the man's name? Suresh Bhattacharya," Phil said, reading from the title-page. "What rot these Indians do write! I suppose that 's by some Bolshie Bengali or other."

"My husband is always reading books like that," said Mrs. McKenzie.

"Oh, well, he 's a judge or something, is n't he?" Pat said. "I suppose he has to. But there is no excuse for Hugh."

"No, I 'm afraid there is n't much," Hugh replied. "But it is n't a bad book, really. Have you read it?" he went on, turning to Phil.

"No, I have n't," he said; "and I don't want to, either. All these Bengalis are the same. They simply don't know when they are well off."

"It 's much too highbrow for me — that kind of thing, I mean," said Pat, ranging herself with Phil and unwilling to be associated with anyone so impossible as to read such a formidable book.

Mrs. McKenzie looked up.

"Hullo! There 's Alie," she said, and she took her feet from the foot-rest of her chair. "Come and sit here," she went on as Alie approached. The two men rose.

"Good morning, chaps," said Alie as she sat down.

"Does Hugh really read this sort of thing?" asked Phil, handing her the offending book.

"Hugh reads all kinds of things," said Alie. "I should think he probably does."

"Anyone ought to be shot who encourages natives to write this sort of tripe," Phil said. "They all ought to be jugged. Of course, you can't understand now," he went on, turning to Hugh, "but when you 've been in the country a few years you will."

"Phil, don't be silly," said Mrs. Greely. "You have never read the book, and I don't think you know what you are talking about." She rose. "Come on, Pat," she continued. "Let 's take a walk before tiffin. Bye-bye, and don't quarrel about books. Phil

does n't really know what he is talking about — and anyway, he will grow out of it."

Aunt and niece rose and left Phil looking red and uncomfortable.

"Sorry, Ranken," he said. "I did n't mean to be so outspoken. Of course, you have n't lived in Calcutta for three years and seen what happened the last row we had there. Why, it was n't safe for a European to be out in some parts alone. Come and play a game of deck quoits, Alie?"

"Right oh!" said Alie cheerfully.

Hugh sat thoughtfully filling his pipe, and Mrs. McKenzie went on with her knitting. It always seemed to be like that. As soon as Alie appeared the women departed sooner or later, on one pretext or another. Mrs. McKenzie, of course, was different — he liked her; but Mrs. Greely always carried off her niece as if contact with Alie would damage her.

Mrs. McKenzie broke the silence.

"She 's a pretty girl."

"Who?" said Hugh, looking up.

"Why, Alie, of course. She seems to be very attractive to men."

"Yes," he said, wondering what was coming next.

"Of course, we have known her family in Ramapet for years, and it always seems to me odd that she should be so."

"I don't see why," Hugh replied. "I don't believe in all this business of heredity and so on. There is no reason at all why she should n't be as nice as anyone else."

"No, of course not. She certainly is very attractive. Do you expect to see much of her in India?"

"Why, of course," said Hugh. "Why not? I shall be in Madras sometime, and I hope to see her again then."

"I see," Mrs. McKenzie said slowly, paying great attention to her knitting. "Of course, I don't want to say anything against the girl or her family, but you know there are some things which people who have never been in India don't understand, and I was only wondering."

"I don't see how you *could* say anything against her," said Hugh, irritated.

"Oh no, there is nothing to be said against her exactly, but I think you ought to be careful how you treat her."

Hugh looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, how do you mean — careful how I treat her?" he exclaimed.

"Well, as I said," Mrs. McKenzie replied, "there are some things people don't understand as well in England as we do in India."

"Do you mean because she has Indian blood?"

Mrs. McKenzie looked startled.

"Oh, I did n't know you knew," she said. "I don't mean there is any harm in it, but you know that people in India see more of Eurasians than people anywhere else, and they look at these things differently."

"Well, I don't see that it makes any difference if she is what you call 'Eurasian.' Alie is Alie, and what her ancestors were should n't matter to anyone."

Hugh felt himself getting annoyed. All these people who went to India seemed to be a race apart. Their outlook, their very standards, were queer. They had curious hidebound conventions of their own. After all, Foote in his play a hundred and fifty years ago had put the matter in a nutshell, and the years seemed to have brought no change: "For your Nabobs they are but a kind of outlandish creatures that won't pass current with us."

"I don't really see what all the fuss is about," he continued. "Here are a lot of quite sane people who all treat a perfectly harmless girl as if she had smallpox, or, worse still, some disease she could help. After all, what does it matter what her breeding is?"

"Oh, well, of course you can't be expected to understand," Mrs. McKenzie replied, in a conciliatory tone. "But in any case, it 's not the individual — it 's the principle of the thing that matters." She looked up. "Oh, there 's the bugle. Let 's go have some tiffin."

Hugh followed her down the companionway into the crowded saloon. His mind was confused. He was used to the fact of class differences, but this was new to him. He had not been unaware of the existence of color prejudice, but he had never realized its potency. It came as something of a shock that anyone could be absolutely unacceptable on that account.

And now came the realization of what Alie was doing in returning to India. She would not be accepted socially, she would live in a world peopled by Eurasians and domiciled Europeans. She would have

no access to the community of British officials and Army officers who populate the clubs. This much Hugh had gathered.

The steward thrust the menu card into his hand.

"Cold beef, please," he said.

CHAPTER IV

At Port Said Hugh went ashore alone. Alie was to go as one of a large party which had formed itself out of nothing, with no idea as to what it was to do beyond eventual lunch at the Casino Palace Hotel. Hugh kept in the background and without much regret he watched them go over the side in a body. In a way he was disappointed. He would have liked to go ashore with Alie, but not as one of a mob trailing aimlessly round a strange city. He preferred to be alone and to get away from the ship at least for a while.

The feel of pavements under his feet was unfamiliar after five days of decks. He sniffed the smell peculiar to Levantine ports and pushed his way through the crowd of hawkers. Beads, imitation amber, postcards, cigarettes — he wanted none of them. Sarolides, Chez Mikado, Simon Artz, were full with people from the ship. He turned sharply to the right, passing a café where Port Said sat drinking its coffee, and walked down a street filled with the offices of ship chandlers and bunkering companies. A little boy ran beside him.

"Sah, sah!"

Hugh walked on.

"Sah, sah, you see Spanish dance? I show you Port Said?

"Sah, sah, I show you Spanish dance. Egyptian gel, very naice.

"Sah, sah, I show you my sister. She do belly dance, very good, very clean.

"Sah, sah, my sister virgin, very clean, very naice."

The little boy dropped off. He was convinced at last that Hugh was not interested. He pattered barefoot, shirt-ends flying, down the sandy road to where more of the *Cochin* were leaving Simon Artz's shop.

Hugh walked on and found himself on the beach. There was a battery of old Krupp guns, relics of the old régime and the days of Turkish rule. A tall black soldier in khaki kept guard on the port with a big telescope mounted in a little hut on stilts. He grinned as Hugh passed, straightened himself and saluted. Hugh went on to the sand, where little blue waves made a playground for butter-colored Greek children in striped bathing costumes who shouted at each other in an argot of Paris and Port Said.

He walked for a mile, ploughing ankle-deep through the yellow sand. He soon left the plaster-fronted, flat-roofed houses with blistered wooden blinds and the rows of gay painted bathing huts along the shore. On the one hand was the sand of Egypt and on the other the glassy smoothness of the tideless sea, blue no longer, but now the shining color of steel in the growing heat of approaching noon. The sand and the sea, apparently all of one level, made a plane complete in itself. Before him and on either side stretched sand and sea to horizons incredibly far away, broken by a smudge of smoke from a steamer.

Behind him the flat-topped line of Port Said looked toylike — a child's attempt at a city built with square wooden blocks.

Acting on impulse, Hugh stripped off his clothes and ran into the sea. He waded through the shallow water of the shelving beach and plunged into the tiny rippling waves. It was surprisingly cold, but the sting of the salt water refreshed him and made him glad that he was alone. He swam with an easy stroke, then rolled on his back and floated basking in the sun. He could forget that within a couple of miles the *Cochin* lay berthed, that the people with whom he had been cooped up for a week were wandering in and out of shops filled with all the trash of Asia, that ragged little boys with bare feet and flying shirt-tails were pimping up and down the untidy streets.

He swam lazily back to the shore and lay with his hat over his eyes on the warm sand to dry. He began to feel hungry and very thirsty, but he delayed the time when he must dress and plough through that mile of clogging loose sand, that mile that now seemed limitless labor. He tantalized his appetite with what things he would order to eat — icy salads and foaming beer. Reluctantly he rose to dress.

At length he found himself on the wide marble-floored verandah of the hotel, looking out through pillars at the long curve of the breakwater, the de Lesseps statue, and the flat sea.

He would lunch and go back to the ship.

As he entered the dining room he ran into Alie's party, a dozen of them seated at a big round table.

"Hullo, here 's Ranken!" they cried.

"Where on earth have you been, Hugh?"

"I 've been bathing," he replied.

"Bathing! Good Lord, no one ever bathes at Port Said!"

"Come on and have lunch, anyway."

Alie moved her chair a little.

"Bring a chair up, Hugh — there 's heaps of room."

Hugh was glad of the gesture. He brought a chair and sat down. The exhilaration of the morning began to leave him. His hair was sticky and his eyes stung. His lips tasted of salt. He felt disheveled beside Alie, who seemed cool and gay as usual.

Lunch over, they sat on the verandah and smoked the fat oval Port Said cigarettes of scented Egyptian tobacco and drank syrupy coffee from tiny cups.

They made a move back to the ship. Outside in the street the glare of the sunshine hurt the eyes. In the dark recesses of the shops merchants slept. The cafés were almost deserted. Only in the big shops catering for the steamship traffic was there any movement. A French ship was in from Colombo and Djibouti, a Bibby liner had arrived from Marseilles outward bound for Rangoon. The passengers they had ejected were doing precisely the same things — buying precisely the same things, following precisely the same round of hot odorous streets — as those of the *Cochin*.

To the shops, midnight and midday, Sunday and week day, were the same. Chez Mikado would open its doors at any hour as soon as a ship was signaled.

Fat Sarolides would do each potential customer the personal and individual honor of giving him a cup of coffee and a rich-looking gold-tipped cigarette with an air of conferring a favor of magnitude. His confidential whisper as he sold a very special piece of tapestry or a scarab of undoubted antecedents rang true at 3 A. M.

Passing Macropolo someone said he had forgotten the cigarettes he had promised to send to his brother. It was some special brand as easily obtainable in Bond Street or Bombay as in Port Said, but cigarettes from Port Said were all the thing. The party trailed in ready for any diversion, however slight. Hugh outside looked round. He was sleepy in the heat after his swim.

A bookshop opposite caught his eye. Of course he must have a book. In the cool interior a melancholy spectacled young man offered him Tauchnitz editions in paper covers.

"The latest," he said.

"Yes," said Hugh doubtfully, examining the shelves of standard editions, not quite sure what he was actually looking for.

"Ah!" said the young man understandingly, brightening a little. He dived behind the counter and produced some grey paper-covered volumes.

"Here," he said in the voice of a conspirator, "here is the newest from Paris. This especially is good — I myself have read it; three pounds ten; ah, it is good!"

Hugh looked at the title.

"No, that 's not quite what I want," he replied.

"No?" The melancholy young man's dejection returned. "No? Well, look — perhaps you will find something — "

He returned to his desk, losing further interest.

Hugh picked out a book or two and returned to the street.

They ambled back through the sunshine to the boat landing. Nobody said much. The enthusiasm had gone out of the day. They found a boat which took them across the oily water of the harbor to the steep ladder up the ship's side.

The deck was crowded. In a corner a voluble conjuror squatted and conjured to a group. He had for properties only several blasé and long-suffering yellow chicks of his own and half-crowns "borrowed," to use his term, from the passengers.

"Gully, Gully, Gully!" he cried. "No chicken, no rabbit. Come, Mrs. Pankhurst, you give me half a crown and I show you. Gully, Gully! What — no chicken! Come on, Missis Duchess of York, I show you. That it. Now Gully, Gully, Gully — why, a little chicken! Now, Mr. Lloyd George, you give me one shilling. Gully, Gully, Gully."

A man sold shawls and abbas and Assiout scarves, blue gleaming with metal. On the outskirts worked the men with Turkish Delight, cigarettes, and beads. The sun shone, and the salesmen in red fezzes grew more frantic in their efforts to sell as the time for departure approached. Hugh joined the crowd round the conjuror.

"Gully, Gully, Gully, come chicken! Get under hat!

Gully, Gully, Gully." He got up and approached Hugh. "Now, Mr. Baldwin, you give me half a crown." Hugh produced the coin and the man dipped his hand into Hugh's pocket.

"Look, Mr. Lloyd George — a chicken!"

The children squealed with delight. The conjuror went to a stout man. "Now, Sir Harry Tate, you give money and see what I do."

"No," said the man. Before he could speak again a chicken was produced from his nose.

Hugh was touched on the elbow.

"Buy a naice sponge, sah — naice sponge."

Down the harbor motor launches and rowboats moved like water beetles, and the Casino Palace Hotel displayed its permanent advertisement, "Dance Tonight."

CHAPTER V

BETWEEN tea and dinner in the *Cochin* there was a long gap. No one knew very well how to fill it. Some played deck games until dark and then went down to bathe and change for dinner. Others walked the deck. Most people were at a loose end. It was too early to settle down to bridge; it was too late to sit down to read in a chair.

Tea itself was not an inspiring meal. It was served in great pots that produced a powerful metallic beverage which only a sturdy palate could appreciate. There were always the same buns — dry and pale, with sugar sprinkled on top. The saloon was hot, the sun low on the horizon glaring in through the starboard ports. The few stewards on duty looked as if they had slept the afternoon away.

Hugh rose without regret from the tea table to go on deck. They were through the Canal and one day down the Red Sea. It was not as hot as he had expected, but hot enough. The side awnings that had been down all day had been rolled up and the decks were comparatively clear.

Hugh walked forward to the end of the deck and leaned on the rail. A cool breeze blew on his face and he began to feel less sticky than he had all day. He was thoroughly enjoying this voyage. With the

exception of Alie and the McKenzies he had known no one when he came on board, but he now felt that he knew at least by name most of the people he wanted to know.

He found many things not what he had expected. The red-faced colonel whose liver was perpetually out of order was conspicuously absent. Instead of sun-dried bureaucrats, he found a world of men with broad interests who could afford to ignore the heat of politics and to regard those who were labeled agitators elsewhere with sympathetic tolerance. These people interested him, but as usual it was Alie who occupied the centre of the stage. He was conscious that she was taking an increasingly important place in his existence. He was beginning to measure time by her appearances and disappearances, to depend on her company — when he could get it — to lend point to the days of shipboard routine, in which time was something to be passed rather than employed.

Alie always welcomed him with a very special manner which conveyed to Hugh, as it was intended to, that he was the person she most wanted to see and that these others were a bore. He did not realize that a glance held just a second more than was necessary with the good-morning greeting had conveyed the same to every man in her group. Alie had confided to Hugh when they were dancing one night that she found the attentions of men on board ship rather a problem, and had intimated that it would be fun if they could see more of each other. Hugh had felt pleased and confident when she had made up a little

face at him as she was claimed by her next partner, who was a man for whom Hugh felt the strongest aversion.

Hugh leaned his elbows on the railing and watched the side of the ship measuring off length after length of smooth velvet-blue water. From further down the deck came the crack and bang of rope quoits thrown at a chalk circle. Someone more bored than amused threw little bags of sand at a bull board.

Hugh had meant to come to some sort of decision about Alie, but the gentle prolonged rise and fall of the ship on the seemingly flat surface of the sea, the tremor from the engines, the bare red hills that stretched in deep-ribbed peaks along the horizon, made it impossible to arrive at any conclusion. He felt suspended in time, held for a moment in a mode of existence in which nothing need be decided. The outside world meant nothing; even the radio bulletins seemed to be unreal, referring to a world in which highly spiced trivialities such as would tickle the senses of the bored traveler were given undue importance. He was as much a fixture and part of the ship as the man in the picture on the bulkhead of his — and indeed of every — cabin; he was a rather melancholy-looking man, it was true, whose picture was provided by a solicitous Board of Trade to show one how to put on a life belt. He did it with an air of importance in the pictures, following the correct sequence of actions as if there were a mystery about the operation — as if one side of the belt were not labeled "Back" and the other "Front," as if it were not as easy as putting on

one's trousers. Hugh wondered who could have lent himself to be the model for that series — he felt that after having shaved opposite him for a week he would recognize him anywhere, with that high bald forehead, that earnest look and air of respectability even in his shirt sleeves.

The sun was sinking — the sea was turning purple. There was an unexpected quality in the light and color of the evening which heightened his sense of adventure. While one could watch the purple sea one could go on forever warming to Alie's nearness, to the soft clinging lightness of her body as she danced, to the curve of her eyelashes.

A bugle brayed harshly on the deck below, and reluctantly he went to his cabin to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER VI

HUGH went up to the music room after dinner, ordered a cup of black coffee and took it to a table. The room was empty but for the stewards with a pile of coffee cups nested into each other. The music room was built as a gallery to the dining saloon, and the whole of the centre of the room was taken up with a railed-in space up from which drifted all the talk and laughter of the diners below. Scraps of conversation came up, all of it trivial, as conversation was inclined to be after ten days at sea: ship jokes, who was likely to win what in the deck sports — talk, indeed, of all those things which loom so large on board and which recede to their proper perspective on shore.

Ship psychology is a curious study, and Hugh already realized that of all these cordial invitations to "look me up" few were intended to be accepted to the letter. They had to be taken at less than face value, small change in the vastly depreciated currency of ship conversation.

Hugh stirred his coffee thoughtfully. Alie was a long time in coming. When she did arrive, so closely draped in her shawl that it looked as if it were her principal article of clothing and her dinner frock only rather indecent underclothing, she was not alone; she had her bodyguard with her. Hugh watched them

take a table across the room. He obviously was not needed. He drank his coffee, and decided to drift into the smoking room. Alie saw him and hailed him across the room.

"Where are you off to?" she cried.

"Oh, I just thought I would go along to see if I could get a game of bridge," he replied.

"Oh, bridge! Well, don't forget there is dancing on deck to-night," she called.

Hugh went over to her table.

"Will you give me a dance to-night, Alie?" he asked.

"Oh, all right," she said. "Number four — and don't be late."

Hugh went out on to the empty deck, where the chairs had been stacked to leave a dancing space. Out beyond the brilliance of the shelter deck the night was black, with little specks of stars showing here and there and very low down on the horizon the tail end of the constellation of the Great Bear. The night was breathless and the sea glassy smooth. He walked along the scrubbed planking to the smoke room, cool under the swing and lunge of the ceiling fans.

Men were coming up from dinner for coffee and already the atmosphere began to be thick with smoke. Some of the men were dressed in correct black, hot though it was; others, following the Calcutta fashion, wore black coats and white trousers; others, from Madras, wore white coats and black trousers. Others, again, were all in white drill dinner suits, smoothly ironed and starched. The room was gradually filling

up. Keith, editor of the *Calcutta Times*, fat, and always affecting an amused cynicism, signaled to Hugh from across the room.

"Come and have coffee and some brandy, Ranken," he called.

Hugh went over.

"You know Sellick of the Police, don't you?" he went on. Hugh nodded, and Sellick, dark-browed and heavy-featured, pushed a leather cigar case at Hugh.

"Have one," he said.

"I should n't if I were you," said Keith. "They 're filthy Trichy's and warranted to kill at sight."

Hugh looked with misgivings at the black oily skins.

"I 'd rather have a pipe, if you don't mind," he replied.

"Sensible fellow," said Keith, and he nudged Hugh and looked meaningly across the table as Sellick turned to pour cream into his coffee. "Interesting if you can get him to talk. He 's Inspector General of Police for the Punjaub.

"Don't mind if we go on talking, do you?" he continued. "We were discussing chances for the Viceroy's Cup in December. As I always say, every gentleman ought to be able to talk interestingly on the possibilities for the Derby, but as we have n't got a Derby I say the same of the Viceroy's Cup. I don't bet much — only three times a year on the National, the Derby, and the Viceroy's. It is what I call buying culture."

Hugh was not interested in horses he did not know,

and he leaned back smoking, pretending to listen, but in reality absorbing snatches from the babel round him.

The Captain, with his gold-laced cap pushed back, was smoking a cigar before going up for a final look round the bridge. Conversation was general.

"You and I, Colonel, and your deal."

"I was in command of the *Sudra* then. We shipped camels for Port Sudan at Karachi. There were two vets on board, neither of whom had ever seen a camel in his life."

"Yes, sir, two brandies, sir, and two whiskey-and-sodas, sir."

"Let 's see, what was his name — I 'll have it in a minute. Surely one of you . . ."

"Gad, you should have smelled those camels! Four hundred of them all stowed under iron decks in the Red Sea in July . . ."

". . . must have met him. A big chap with a moustache and a baldish head. I think his name began with an *H*, or maybe an *M*. It was a funny name, too — at least, there was something funny about it. I 'll have to tell you about it later."

"Yes, sir, coming, sir. One moment, sir."

"As I told the Company afterwards, that sort of thing should not be allowed; but they did a lot of funny things, like shipping camels to Egypt, at the beginning of the War."

"Anyway, his name does n't matter. Well, you see, this chap whose name I can't remember — "

"Well, all those vets knew about camels was what

they say in *Animal Management,* which is that you should keep clear of the head because it bites and the tail because it kicks. Well, both of them kept so clear that neither of them faced the stink below until we were one day out of Port Sudan."

"I 'll have his name soon. It will come to me suddenly in the middle of the night, probably. I never forget anything, you know, for long. Well, you see, this chap, when he was commanding the Thirty-ninth Sikh Cavalry, or perhaps it was the Thirty-second — I can't remember quite; but they were stationed . . ."

". . . took my putter . . ."

"It was blowing heavy monsoon from the southwest all the way from Karachi. One of the vets was sick until we got under the lee of Socotra . . ."

"Well, you see, this chap — by Gad, I 've got it! It was 'Shorty' Smart. We called him 'Shorty' because he was so tall. I knew there was something funny about his name — "

". . . and I met him skiing three winters ago at St. Moritz."

". . . and the other vet sat playing double solitaire with the chief engineer and said he 'd be damned if he 'd risk his dinner by going below to look at the camels. I was never so glad as when I saw the last of those ugly beasts slung over the side."

"Of course, old 'Shorty' told it better than I can, but you can see how funny it would be. I laugh now to think of him telling it. There was the old general sitting in his bath . . ."

". . . we only lost thirty. It took months to

get the ship clean, and when we started trooping to Mespot everyone complained of the stink and the fleas and ticks."

"You should see him skiing. He could do all the turns. And his Telemark was a marvel — "

"Camels! I 'd as soon carry fish manure and wet salted hides. I 'll never carry camels again, and I told them so."

"No, you do a Telemark like this — watch my feet. You see, both knees bent a little like this and the weight on the inside ski. No, I forgot. I mean the weight on the outside leg and press out like this with the heel. Oh, sorry, sir, I did n't mean to knock your elbow. Steward, another coffee, please. No, I did n't hurt myself at all, thanks."

Outside on deck the ship's band was playing for the third dance, and as the music came to an end Hugh finished his brandy and got to his feet.

Keith turned from his discussion.

"Oh, are you going?" he said. "I hoped we might have some bridge."

"I 'll be back after this dance," said Hugh over his shoulder as he stepped over the coaming on deck. There the ship's band had taken its post with a tuneless piano that found the sea air hard on its inside. It lived a troglodyte existence in a box on deck only to see the light every other evening. Flags, brassy yellows and brilliant reds, draped the rails, and while they succeeded in making the dull buff of awnings, stanchions' rails, and bulkheads look somewhat less de-

pressing in the dim light, they shut out what little breeze there was.

Hugh looked round for Alie. Pat, tucked away in a shadowed corner in a long chair with someone sitting on the foot-rest, smiled at him as he passed. Mrs. McKenzie was sitting on the rail, her arm round a stanchion, jolly and laughing as usual. But he could not find Alie.

"Have you seen Alie?" he asked Mrs. Greely.

"Sorry, I have n't, Hugh," she replied in a tone that implied that she wished she might never again. God, these people with their worry about this or that in their tiny social organization! All like squirrels in a cage, round and round and round; and, if not that, fighting for the top perch.

Hugh wandered down the deck again towards the smoke room. He felt Alie needed him, and would need him more the nearer they got to Bombay — and then goodness knows what would happen. It was unthinkable that she should get swallowed up and absorbed into that unknown India, one of the untouchables.

He threaded his way through the couples who danced toilsomely and stood near the smoke-room door where he could see the whole deck. The dance was nearing its end. Alie was nowhere to be seen.

As Hugh watched the dancers, a man stumbled over the coaming of the smoke-room door.

" 'Lo, Ranken," he said, and Hugh realized that he was a little drunk. "Not dancin'? I thought you always danced with Alie Cross."

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Hugh, "I was wondering where she had got to. I am supposed to be having this with her. You have n't seen her, have you?"

"Why, no, I can't say I have, but I expect you 'll find her being shown the Southern Cross in a secluded place forward somewhere. I 'll bet she can see the stars above! She 's a hot little bit, but I pity the man who has to marry her. I expect you know more about her than I do — but you 'll have to watch out if you don't want to be cut out by some other seducer of the fair and frail."

He laughed loudly at his own words and teetered a little backward and forward on his toes.

The dance ended.

"I must go and play bridge," said Hugh shortly. There was no point in saying anything. The man was drunk — there was nothing to be gained by having the row with him he felt like having. He turned abruptly into the smoking room.

CHAPTER VII

"No time for another rubber," said Keith as his fat hands gathered the cards. "Anyway, we 're about all square, so it could n't be a better time to stop."

"It 's about my time to turn in," said Sellick, yawning and stretching. "Comin' out to get the fug out of your brain?" he asked the fourth at the table, and together they left through the haze of the tobacco smoke.

"Do you want to go, Ranken?" Keith asked.

"No, I don't think so."

"That 's right. I always like to sit up and hear what other people have to say — which naturally means that I like to hear the sound of my own voice. I get so much of other people's opinions on paper that I like to get a word in sometimes. Where are you going to stay in Bombay?"

"Oh, I don't know," Hugh replied indifferently. "Hotel, I suppose."

"All Bombay hotels are vile — viler than anywhere else. They succeed worse in making you feel at home than anywhere in the world. You know people, I suppose?"

"Well, I can't say I do. I have got letters of introduction to various people — a man called Stark for

one, but I don't suppose he will want to be bothered with me."

"Don't you worry about that," Keith replied. "He is certain to put you up. Mrs. Stark 's a corker; but beware of her — she 's a collector of scalps; no harm in her, but she demands undeviating service. Wish I could offer you bed and board, but if you come to Calcutta in your wanderings you look me up at the *Times*. I 've got a house out at Alipore — a bit out of the way, but I 'd be glad to have you and hear what you have to say."

"Thanks," said Hugh. "I should like to."

"Now, don't forget. I know what ship invitations are, but I really do mean it. What are your plans after you land?"

"I don't quite know," Hugh replied. "I suppose I shall stay in Bombay for a time, and then go North to look round and see the sights. I have only the vaguest idea how I am going to do it."

"Well, you are lucky not to have any preconceived ideas, but I am afraid that you are bound to be a little disappointed in the human side of India. Its romance has been badly overrated. It is really only romanticism fostered by the ignorance of the outside world."

"But surely Kipling knew his India, and he made it romantic enough!"

"Kipling may have known it, — parts of it, — but after all it was his business to make it all mysterious and creepy and to people his books with detectives like Strickland and Eurasian boys like Kim. And the

tourist ship advertisements keep up the illusion."

"But surely one never knows India — at least, it has become axiomatic that the more one knows of it the less one realizes one knows."

Keith waved a fat hand airily.

"Possibly. Possibly, Ranken; but who, and you least of all, should worry about little details, interesting though they are, of who wears what sort of twist to his hair or what kind of mark on his forehead? No, though I like to know these things, I like more to know the mind of the people — and let me tell you that India is badly in need of someone to debunk it."

"That 's rather sweeping, is n't it?"

"It is n't a bit too sweeping. Why should we attribute special knowledge, special mental qualities, to a people manifestly ignorant and mentally undeveloped? All their knowledge is known to the West, and it is all of the kind that teaches that the world is a flat cake swimming in a bowl of treacle."

"Oh, look here, Keith, this is rank heresy — a country with a civilization as old as India's must have handed down something to its people."

"Yeah! It has. It has handed it down intact, as fresh as the day their philosophies were evolved, with never a mark or scratch, gods and goddesses complete, less imaginative, more commonplace, than Greek mythology. It is just as if we still accepted all the Greeks believed without alteration. But then, that 's India's trouble."

"What is?"

"Why, the entire lack of any sort of inquiry. India produces a mind incapable of original research but ready to absorb any amount of other people's learning — great gobs of it. Why, India is the Paradise of mediocrity. Your very Europeans, your Englishmen who come out here to run the place, are mediocre with a brilliance unsurpassed elsewhere. If they were very good they would not come, and if a brilliant man does come he is snatched away at once. If they are very bad they can't come. They have a fine standard of honesty, and some mind, but there are few exceptional men."

"But, damn it, Keith, among Indians you have the Tagores and Gandhis — they are fine enough mentally, are n't they?"

"Tagore, yes; and Gandhi to some extent."

"Oh, come, be generous. Gandhi at least had all India at his feet in 1922, and if they had not crammed him in jail he would have had the Indian Government out. They simply put him in jail to save their skins."

"When they jailed him Gandhi had shot his bolt — his power was gone; and, in any case, he broke the law and there was nothing to do but lock him up. Now Gandhi himself is the finest example of India's ballyhoo. He is followed by only a comparatively small section of India, by the most vociferous, and the world thinks he commands the whole. He epitomizes the desire of India to be regarded from a different point of view from any other nation in the world.

"What, occurring in England or America, would

be called crankiness or stupidity, occurring in India, is regarded in the West as mysterious and romantic.

"No one in his senses in the West suggests that we should all dress in skins again, but in India everyone is to spin and weave his own garments, and that is considered charming.

"Then the burning of cloth. We don't go and pile all the Fords in England on a bonfire to free ourselves from American economic domination. We export goods or services to America instead.

"Here they burn foreign cotton cloth made in England, Japan, or Europe, to free themselves from the economic domination of England, and yet go on trying to export their cotton to England!"

Hugh broke in. "I must say you can't shake my faith in Gandhi as a world force, Keith. Why, he has the true idea of peace. Non-coöperation is the very image of peace!"

"Oh, go on, Ranken, liken Gandhi to Christ straight away — it 's been done before; but I would remind you Christ never did an insane, cranky thing, and He never interfered in politics. 'Render unto Cæsar' is as definite a command to respect the powers that be as anything you can imagine. The Indian Government in this case is Cæsar — and a very liberal, democratic one at that!"

"Time to close, sir," said the bar steward.

"Well, that ends it, I suppose," Keith remarked, raising his bulk from his chair and finishing his drink. "Of course, I don't say Gandhi is not a fine type — he is a saint turned politician, and the two don't go

well together. It does no one any good when a politician shuts himself up to fast for a period of weeks because his followers have misbehaved themselves."

The lights went out one by one and the bar steward stood ostentatiously by the door, key in hand.

"Ha, h'm," said Keith, yawning. "Good Lord, I did n't know it was as late as this! Well, let 's turn in."

As they walked along the deck outside, dimly lit and cool with a salty night breeze, Keith said, " 'Oh, send us some day a politician in India, strong and honest, practical and of this world, who will dare to say what he means, whom India will follow. For all the Hindu Pantheon's sake, for Allah's sake, and any other gods' sake, Amen.' That 's my nightly prayer. The trouble with India is that it likes a touch of unreality in its politicians and its daily life. The sort of rumor that the Indian Government foments Hindu Mohammedan trouble — 'divide and rule,' you know — goes like wildfire. They love it. They don't realize that it does n't speak well for the intelligence of Government if the little Hindu Moslem troubles of the last fifty years were the best they could arrange. Well, well, possibly they are the best they can do — that is, if all the babus in the land have been ordered to get busy on it. Such scampering round and looking up orders *re* 'Trouble — Hindu Moslem — instructions for the fomentation of.'

"Well, well, good night, young feller. I 'd like to hear some more of what you have to say." And

chuckling a fat laugh Keith dived into his cabin like a stout and elderly rabbit.

Hugh walked up the deck to watch the phosphorescence and the stars, and to taste the air before going to the hot stuffiness of his cabin.

CHAPTER VIII

HUGH woke to unusual stillness. There was no tremor of the engines, no sound of the sea. He lay on his bunk in his pyjamas, hot and sticky. The roaring fan threw a draught on his face, but it was the used-up air of the cabin. Looking through his port, from where he lay he could see a circle of saffron sky paling before the dawn. He had arrived.

He got up and looked through the port. The brass circle framed his view, his first of Bombay and India. At some time while he slept the anchor had gone down, and now they lay waiting for the daylight and the first of the flood tide before going alongside. He could see the jagged black outlines of North and South Karanja against the dawn sky, green and gold above, turning to pink below. A puff of breeze in his face brought land smells of earth and trees.

He went for a bath, perforce content with a copper tub of fresh water; no sea water to be had, so the Goanese steward said — Bombay harbor water too dirty.

As he dressed his eyes were drawn to the circle of the port, through which he could see the light turning from pink to scarlet. Between ship and shore the sea was dark, almost black, with blacker flecks of fishing boats racing for the Kasara Basin with the night's catch.

Eager to be on deck, he slipped into his clothes and went through the long stuffy passages and up the companionway under the notice board dead with yesterday's radio bulletin and already forgotten advices of ship activities.

The lights of Bombay, long strings down along the docks, were going out in blocks five, six, a dozen at a time. The black blot of Middle Ground merged into the background of houses. A little fresh breeze came up from the lightening east. A signal lamp on the pier winked and chattered; the engine-room telegraph clanged startlingly close at hand. Someone shouted through a megaphone from the bridge and the winch engine forward on the fo'c'sle clanked, with a white feather of steam blowing from the ship's side. The wet links grumbled in over the drums.

The propellers kicked a heelful of muddy water and Ballard pier grew imperceptibly closer.

The bay turned blue in the glowing light, although the water directly beneath was muddy brown. The sky was now red and gold. Hugh looked towards the city, and, as he watched, the level rays of the early-morning sun struck the graceful lines of the Gateway of India — golden stone in hard relief against the dreary mass of the Taj Mahal Hotel. The white yachts in the anchorage bobbed and curtsied to the tide and the little breeze.

Dock cranes, chimneys, the University clock tower, stood out plain and clear at last. It was exactly what he thought it would be. "A stone water lily labeled Hong-Kong."

The deck was white with the chalk of last night's dance. The flags and streamers had long ago disappeared. Hugh wished for someone to talk to — he knew it was too much to hope for Alie to be up at that hour. He looked around. Standing with his back to the rail was an Indian policeman — blue-clad, with a primrose-colored turban. He gazed into space and shot a stream of blood-red betel juice on to the deck.

Hugh from the rail watched the *Cochin* manœuvre to the wharf, the gap of lapping water grow narrower, and the passage of warps from ship to shore. He watched the bustle and excitement round him, but he felt no need to hurry. He assumed that he would find somewhere to go. He could wait. The mail trains for Calcutta and for the Punjaub lay drawn up alongside; the mail bags were ready to be swung overside in huge nets.

The engine-room telegraph rang on the bridge above his head. He heard the gong respond in the engine room. "Finished with engines!" The gangplanks came in, the crowd on the wharf surged aboard. Men whom he had hardly met on board shook his hand.

"Well, good-bye, Ranken. Look me up when you get to — Ambala or Trivandrum, Peshawar or Mandalay — don't forget, now, you know my name, and they 'll always know where I am at the Club. Good-bye, and don't forget, now. Good-bye." And a vague wave of the hand. "So that," he thought, "is that." In a fortnight they would be back in

their stations, with home leave a blazing memory of the distant past and Hugh Ranken an incident in it.

On deck the crowd surged and moved. Sir Shriram of the Viceroy's Council was being garlanded with heavy strings of marigolds, poor little roses wired to sticks, and heavily scented jasmine. He bent his head to receive another garland, but he was ever so slightly drunk and weaved back and forth. The garlander dabbed at him twice, thrice, and Sir Shriram began to see it as a game. He swayed his head from side to side, bellowing his brazen laugh. The little man who would do him the honor, short and fat, bespectacled, and sweating with fright, made ineffectual dabs. The garlands were interwoven with tinsel strips which tickled the folds of Sir Shriram's fat neck. As he stopped a moment to scratch, the garland fell in place.

Everyone sweated down here in the docks sheltered from any breeze; amid the jostling crowds the air was still and heavy. Suits stuck across the shoulders, and dark stains appeared on newly washed silk.

Cook's man thrust a card at Hugh. A man selling rupees waved a bundle of dirty notes. An Indian uniformed in a long coat with flaring skirts and a red cloth band three inches wide over one shoulder presented a letter to Hugh.

"Ranken Sahib?" he asked.

Hugh took the note addressed to himself.

"Yes," he said, ripping open the cover. It was from Mr. Stark.

My dear Ranken, —

I am very sorry that I was not able to get down to meet the mail steamer this morning. I heard from your chief that you were likely to be in Bombay for a short while. I don't know what your arrangements are, but my wife and I would be very glad if you would stay with us for the time you are here.

The bearer of this will look after your kit.

Yours sincerely,

H. S. Stark

Hugh read the letter through, wondering what he should do. The man who had given him the note stood impassively before him.

"Keith!" Hugh called as the fat editor appeared. "Here you are. Your forecast is entirely correct. Read that. What ought I to do? Do you think I can take the hospitality of a man I don't know?"

Keith laughed, handing back the note.

"Why, of course you can. Don't be an ass, my dear fellow, and go to any of these Bombay hotels. You take just whatever is offered to you and be safe in the knowledge that it is merely the last flicker of an Indian hospitality which is rapidly dying out. Of course you must go. You 'll be much happier there than you would be alone, and you 'll see more. Well, I must run. Good-bye, old man, and don't forget to look me up in Calcutta."

With a wave of his fat hand he was gone.

The bearer of the note let out a stream of Hindustani.

"I am sorry, I don't understand," said Hugh.

"He is asking for your keys for the customs," said someone over Hugh's shoulder, "and says that the car is waiting for you at the main entrance."

"Oh, thanks," said Hugh as he handed over his keys.

"I should wait here for him, if I were you, and let him get hold of your kit, and then he can show you the car."

"Thank you," said Hugh, but his adviser was already on his way down the deck.

Alie had not appeared. Hugh wondered what had happened to her, and assumed that she was merely sleeping late as usual. Such momentous events as arrivals of ships and trains, customs examinations and meals, affected her less than anyone he had ever met before. Last night amid the confetti and streamers of the fancy-dress dance she had refused to say even a temporary good-bye, and that was comparatively early in the evening. He had not seen her again after that.

He leaned over the rail, watching the flow from ship to shore — the endless procession of baggage coolies with trunks down the gangways, the mails in the swollen canvas bags being slung overside.

Stark's man returned.

"Ready, Sahib," he said.

But Hugh stayed to keep an eye on the deck and the gangways. He must see Alie. The messenger waited — he was in no hurry and he had all day to waste.

Hugh wondered what had happened to Alie. Surely she could not be long now. As he wondered what to

do, he suddenly caught sight of her disappearing down the further gangway with a stout dark elderly man.

Hugh made a dash for the nearest gangway and had to wait for the upcoming stream. He found an opening and managed to reach the solid concrete of the wharf, followed by his obedient messenger into the customs shed. He had forgotten the dispatch case in his hand. The customs officer went through the formality of chalking on it an indecipherable hieroglyphic. Hugh looked round for Alie, but she seemed to have disappeared.

He was disappointed. Somehow he ought to have reached her.

CHAPTER IX

ALIE in the wreck of her cabin sat on the edge of her bunk. Her head ached a little. She had a nasty taste in her mouth. The ship's tea had an even more metallic taste and brothy texture than usual. She halted in pulling on her second stocking, then with it halfway up her leg she went to look out of the port. She could see nothing but the granite blocks of the pier and a heavy warp that crossed a black bar in her view. The familiar throb of the engines was still, but overhead was the tread of feet, the clatter of voices.

Alie stretched and went to the glass over the washbowl. She looked at her face intently. The whites of her eyes were yellow and poached. She dabbed her face, neck, and shoulders with a powder puff. Wherever it touched, the powder stuck. It would not lie smoothly, but collected under eyes and round her nostrils. Alie threw the puff on the floor. "Damn!" she said impersonally, and poured herself a long drink of tepid water. She grabbed her frock, and was preparing to dive into it when someone knocked on the door.

Alie hesitated a moment, then, "Come in," she said.

After all, what did it matter? She felt too ill to care much who it was. It was probably only Phil or

one of the other boys come to kiss her good-bye. What did it matter, anyway?

On the other side of the door Alie's father stood, white sun helmet in hand. He gave a gayer twirl to his moustache and wiped his forehead. They told him this was his daughter's room, and he wondered what he was going to meet. From her pictures he could imagine her standing, lips a little apart, waiting for him. She would be a little shy, then she would throw her cool arm round his neck.

"Papa, I am so happy."

"There, there, there."

And old Albert Cross turned the handle of the door.

What he saw was Alie standing, — to his eyes almost naked, — frock in hand, the room a litter of clothing and shoes, dolls of three different sizes, and a dirty cocktail glass a quarter full of sodden cigarette ash. They stood looking at each other, father and daughter who had not seen each other for ten years.

Alie looked anxiously at this man, brown-skinned and bald-headed, his forehead beaded with sweat and the lips loose under the sagging sweep of the walrus moustache. She carried her eyes from the three folds of the neck down over the soft paunchy little body on its insufficient legs. Important, he felt some of his importance ooze under the appraisal. He wiped his brow again.

So this is he, she thought, and she looked at herself in the glass, wondering that her slim, flat little self could have come from him. She caught her own eye

and looked away in a hurry, for she saw there something of the look of herself as she might be.

Her head ached and her tongue tasted bad.

Albert began to collect himself. He sensed something improper in standing facing his daughter in this fashion.

"Well, Alie," he began in the singsong of the Eurasian which sounded oddly familiar to Alie, who had heard nothing like it for years.

Albert tried again.

"Well, well, and how is my little girl? Oah, Alie, does n't it feel good to be home, is n't it?"

"Look here, you sit outside till I 'm ready, there 's a good boy." And Alie with a maternal pat on the shoulder ejected him from the cabin. It was only when he got into the passage outside, blocked by trunks, jostled by stewards and baggage coolies, that he realized that Alie's greeting had been indifferent, to say the least. It was not what he had expected, but then, as he said, you always get what you don't expect most. At least, that is what he had always found true with Louisa about, and he had gradually become converted to an inveterate pessimism. Nowadays, anyway, he generally expected nothing from life.

Alie in her cabin slipped into her frock and turned again to the mirror. The powder she had put on seemed to have collected in drifts — she fiercely dabbed on more in coarse yellow patches. She ran a comb through her hair and crammed on a hat. She opened the door and called her father.

"Here, Dad," she commanded, "if you want to get

off quick you 'll have to help me clean up." Cramming into suitcases what they could, and leaving what they could not, Alie at length decided she was ready.

They left the cabin, Albert following Alie with two of the absurd sophisticated dolls nakedly exposed under his arm.

Alie was in two minds how to proceed. She did not want to leave the ship without saying good-bye to Phil and Hugh — particularly Hugh. Hugh she felt to be someone so unintelligibly solid and dependable that she could not bear the thought of losing him completely. She could willingly ride over him roughshod, but he was so different from the others that she felt some pride in having his admiration. She preferred the Phils of her life for entertainment, but Hugh, dull and pedantic, had an attraction she did not stop to define, even if she had had a mind sufficiently analytical to enable her to do so. Were she married to Hugh she could have been unfaithful to him and yet have felt no twinge of conscience. She was essentially polyandrous in her outlook.

On the other hand, she could not take her father on deck as her father — the idea hardly occurred to her. No, she would have to leave without seeing Phil and risk missing the delights which he had offered to her in Christmas week in Calcutta if she would be a sport and come up. She would have to miss Hugh and risk not seeing him in Bombay. She could not be humiliated. As she came on deck she saw Hugh alone standing by the main gangway. She made a bolt

down the deck to where the baggage was being taken off at a gangway further aft.

"This is the way, Alie. Alie, where are you going?" panted Albert Edward after her.

"You come on and don't be silly," she retorted, and then, under her breath, "You should n't have come to meet me if you did n't want to make me look awful in front of all these people." Sandwiching herself in the hurrying line of coolies she led the way on to the pier.

Albert was too used to being ruled by his womenfolk to object to anything that his daughter might say or do. He followed obediently.

The customs were difficult. The men spoke with the same singsong as Albert Edward, accenting their words in a way which seemed to be increasingly familiar to Alie. She found herself unconsciously speaking the same language — a language which came easily to her tongue. It was something forgotten and now remembered.

Startlingly distinct to her mind came the picture of Aunt Aggie and her mother. "Oah yess, Alee. You are a nottee girl. Do not do it, I say."

At first the customs officers opening her suitcases treated her with the same obsequiousness which they were extending near by to Mrs. McKenzie and the Greelys, but when they realized that she was connected with her father that manner ceased abruptly. They talked to her in louder voices. They ordered. They demanded.

Alie was angry and hot when they finally got

through the darkness of the hall which offered fictitious coolness and into the sunshine beyond.

"Well, here we are at last. Those customs chaps are too *zubberdusti,* I always say," said Albert, with the air of a hardened traveler.

"Oh, stop it," Alie said querulously, prepared to take everything out on her father. Her head ached and she felt as if she would like to be sick. Those drinks, and a hangover that made her feel like hell — and look like hell, too, she thought, as she dabbed powder feverishly at the stickiness of her nose.

Albert led the way across the gravel to the line of cars parked on the other side. Alie, following, wondered which it would prove to be. She admired the immaculate drivers in white and khaki drill. She tried to attach car after car to her father, but none of them seemed quite to fit. Sir Shriram passed lolling in a Daimler painted white. He waved a fat hand and grinned from his bower of marigold garlands.

Albert stopped eventually in front of a car which had been borrowed for him for the occasion by Louisa. It was old and it looked it. Alie examined it distastefully.

"Now where is that driver chap?" Albert demanded. "I told him to wait, and see what has happened. He has gone and we are stuck up."

Alie said nothing. She watched the coolies distribute her bags over the car, on the cushions through which the stuffing and springs were making their appearance, on the floor, and on the wings.

With detachment she heard her father wrangle with

the coolies over the small change he had distributed with an air of scattering largesse. She saw people she had known on board sweep by in lordly cars. Some waved — most did not; and she pretended that she was unconnected with this man who squabbled with a coolie over an anna.

Her father returned, hot but victorious. "Get in," he said. "I think the driver will be here in a little while, is n't it?

"Oah, there he is," he went on, waving to a barefooted Goanese in dirty khaki and a cloth cap. "There is Anthony. Get in, Alie. Ah, he has seen us!"

The man shambled up, to be met with a stream of language from the enraged Albert, who seemed to get angrier as he stated the justice of his cause. Anthony cranked the car without a word. Alie leaned back and shaded her eyes with her hand. She hoped that no one would recognize her. Fortunately, she did not know that Anthony could claim relationship — distant, it is true, but relationship enough for India — through Louisa. He was one of those many family hangers-on who cling to the successful Indian, however only slightly successful, and in return for board and lodging and some reflected glory do odd jobs inefficiently for nothing.

Anthony got in and the car leaped forward into the sweeping stream of traffic — and stopped.

"Saint Maria, the bloody thing has stopped!" he remarked with a grin over his shoulder, glad of the chance to display his knowledge of English, picked up on the fringe of the barracks at Colaba.

This remark unloosed another superheated torrent of language from Albert Edward, down whose bald brown forehead the sweat was streaming. Anthony, pricked into action, cranked furiously.

As he did so the McKenzies' car drew up alongside. McKenzie, looking cool and cheerful in immaculately pressed white, hailed Albert.

"Hullo, Cross!" he cried. "Glad to see you. I hoped I should see you on board."

Albert leaped from the car, all smiles. He removed his hat with an elaborate sweep and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Why, Mr. McKenzie!" he said, taking the hand held out to him. "I hope you are so well, and your mem-sahib too? And did you have a good leave, I hope?"

Alie in her seat shrank back, her face shaded with her hand. She loathed the dirty driver-cousin, the McKenzies, and above all this father of hers who seemed irrepressible. She wished anything might happen.

"Alee, Alee!" her father cried. "Here is Mr. McKenzie and his mem-sahib. Come and say how-do-you-do."

Alie pretended she had not heard and buried herself deep in the only partially satisfactory thing in range — the sight of herself in the little mirror in the top of her powder box. Even this somehow failed to please.

Anthony desisted from his efforts to crank the car and peered into the interior to juggle with wires.

"Oah, Alee," said Albert Edward, scrambling back into the car, "you should have come when I called. Mr. McKenzie is a burra sahib in Ramapet, and I do not wish to offend him."

Anthony bent again to cranking the car, and this time his efforts were rewarded. With a shuddering roar it started, and he hurled himself into the driving seat. It moved forward with a jerk that threw Alie back in her seat.

CHAPTER X

HUGH found ten days in Bombay ample. He became just a little tired of it. He raced on Saturday, danced and lunched at the Yacht Club on Friday, tennised at the Ladies' Gymkhana, and dined at the Byculla Club. He hunted at the Jackal Club and rode on the sands at Juhu, but the more he saw of Bombay the less he saw of India.

Hugh was bored by the Starks, and they by him. Mrs. Stark's India was English — more English than anything he knew in England. Her intention was to graft England on to India. She tried to disregard the fact that India was the place in which she had to live. Her drawing-room was filled with teakwood copies of Jacobean oak. She avoided any taint of the Orient; she forswore any fabrics or materials that might be regarded as a local product. She bought her clothes in Paris and London. She would if necessary shop for anything at that expensive headquarters of respectability, the Army and Navy Stores, rather than go to the bazaar.

At her house one breakfasted at nine or ten on fish and bacon and lunched at half-past one. One tea'd, dined, and danced at regular and stated intervals.

Her society as she would have had it was intensely conventional. With the Governor at its centre, it re-

volved in widening circles round the orbit of Government House — "G. H.," as the initiated called it.

Mrs. Stark was of course aware that there were Indians. Men had to meet them on business, but women need not and had no interest in them. Mrs. Stark's husband had lived twenty years in India and knew enough of the language to give orders to his syce about his horses, but Mrs. Stark, pretty Mrs. Stark, had lived in India five years and could not say a word except in her own language. The butler spoke good English, and so did the cook. Other servants' orders were given through either.

Indian servants were merely incidental, as were all kinds of Indians. Mrs. Stark was aware that she had various servants. There was an ayah who spoke English and who retailed the most scandalous gossip in a soft voice as she stood behind her mistress when she dressed her of an evening. The room in darkness, the bright lights over the triple mirror on the glass-topped dressing table threw back pretty Mrs. Stark's image at herself, making harsh the lines by her mouth and the slight, ever so slight, tendency to string in her neck. One rounded silk knee over the other, seated on her dressing-table stool she sought to soften these little harshnesses with sponge and lotion, cream, puff and powder, so that in the more kindly light downstairs Mrs. Stark's husband would watch to see men bend and break before this vision of innocence and youth.

In the darkness behind, ayah in a dark red sari, her thin claw fingers handing everything into the light

as it was required, dished up the spiced gossip of the servants' quarters: how Joyce Mem-sahib's baby, which people had heard had died, had been strangled by the Doctor Sahib because it was a monster; how Jones Mem-sahib did not let the Sahib come into her room because she was afraid of having another baby; and how the ayah had found Brown Mem-sahib's butler in the Mem-sahib's bedroom one afternoon.

It was all quite untrue, but it gave Mrs. Stark little thrills that ran up her spine to think of the wickedness of the world. She would let her mind find a passionate outlet in any story her ayah's inventive genius could produce, and her body vicariously enjoyed illicit affairs. In actual practice she was cold and hard, a virginal little old maid.

Mrs. Stark knew that there were other servants — a couple of hamals, her husband's boy, a sweeper, and three or four gardeners. She was aware of them, they served her, but she neither knew nor cared further about them.

Hugh decided he must go. He had come to India to see Indians, but in Bombay with the Starks that was not done. In the Willingdon Club, it is true, he had come across the hybrid Europeanized product, wealthy and stamped with the stamp of English public school and university. The Willingdon Club had been founded by a Governor to form a meeting ground for Indian and European. To a certain extent it succeeded, but the Indian members were those Indians whose habits of life, opinions, and lines of thought

were so similar to those of the European members that they differed only in the color of their skins.

The Indians Hugh had met were colorless and uninteresting, centring their ambitions in their own social circles and radiating, as ever in Bombay, from Government House. Hugh found no common ground for conversation. When tennis, golf, cotton prices, and the share market were exhausted, there was nothing. Hindu, Mohammedan, and Parsee kept strictly to their own people, and although Europeans might try to mix it was only from a sense of social duty. He met young Parsees who drove fast cars, Hindus who wore the blazers of Cambridge colleges, Mohammedans who played tennis and rode polo ponies, but none who could offer anything more than an imitation of a European mode of life, and extreme reticence or else ignorance concerning things Indian outside their immediate Westernized circles.

Hugh decided to spend Christmas with his old regiment. He took the Indian *Bradshaw* and wrote Fontyn of the Herefords at Islamabad. Thence he would go north again. He told his bearer to pack his things and announced his intention at breakfast one morning.

"Oh, must you go?" asked Mrs. Stark unconvincingly, as she poured out coffee. She had had Hugh on her conscience for the ten days he had been there, and she would be glad to have him out of the house. Mrs. Stark's husband made no comment. He offered the services of an office clerk to buy his ticket, book his berth and his luggage, and see him off at the sta-

tion. All these Hugh accepted gratefully, and thus it happened that he drove up to Victoria Station in the Starks' car to catch the mail northwards at nine o'clock.

CHAPTER XI

It seemed to Hugh, used to the comparatively short journeys and carefully arranged travel of England, a somewhat casual affair to have dinner in comfort with people he hardly knew, to be pushed out into a warm dark, to drive through the flare and lights of Bombay streets without luggage, with a two-day journey ahead of him. His servant and his luggage had been packed off an hour before him in an overloaded horse-drawn victoria in charge of a functionary with a brass badge from Mrs. Stark's husband's office, to meet him, all in due order and without trouble to himself, on the train. His tickets, too, were in the hands of another man, a clerk, and he felt that he might as easily step out of the car into one of the cinema shows in New Queen's Road advertising Elmo the Mighty or Eddie Polo as into his compartment in the Punjaub Mail.

When the car stopped he was met by the clerk brandishing his tickets. He picked his way through the crowd of hawkers selling walking sticks and fruit, middle-aged magazines, and earthenware drinking-water bottles. Led by the clerk, he went through the main hall of the station, the clerk pushing his way, unceremoniously cuffing the boy who asked alms, and roughly elbowing the rustic who gazed vacantly into space.

"Dirty sweeper-folk, sir," the clerk cast back over his shoulder. He was a man of education, a graduate of Bombay University, drawing his hundred and ten rupees a month, with a house in the suburbs and a vote. He regarded these lowly folk as unworthy of notice.

Boards advertising the departure of trains for places as far apart as Madras and Peshawar, Agra and Calcutta, excited Hugh. Tickets were shown at a barrier, and he followed the little clerk with his round black brimless hat and his thin bare legs on to the clearer space of the platform. The long brown double-roofed carriages lay on either side, groups standing round the doors. Hugh's compartment was ready for him, his servant waiting at the door. He was eager to see what his home for the next night and day would be like, but he did not want to miss the life and movement under the garish station lights.

He stood on the platform. The fruit sellers haggling with their loads of loose-skinned Nagpur oranges, their scarlet apples from the Kulu hills, their grapes from Kabul and beyond Peshawar, passed and repassed. Two soldiers in a line regiment, forage caps set jauntily askew, swaggered down the platform. A Eurasian sergeant of police with a dark-skinned wife, two children, and a multiplicity of packages took possession of a second-class carriage next his own. The air was chill and Hugh was glad of the warmth and comfort of his overcoat.

"I go now, sir?" said a voice from under his elbow, and the little Indian clerk insinuated himself before

him. "Here are tickets, sir. I have given bearer his ticket. Maybe I think you not wanting more, sir?"

Hugh, hands in overcoat pockets, was deep in thought, although his face betrayed nothing of what was going on in his mind. Should he offer the little man a tip? He looked peaked and cold, and he had obviously overstayed his office hours, but then, on the other hand, one would never think of offering a clerk in a similar position at home a little something for his trouble.

"No, no more, thank you," he said. Then, desperately, to give himself time to decide on something, "Is my luggage in with me, or is there any registered?"

"No, sir, all kits are in the room. Bearer not wishing putting elsewhere."

Should he give him anything? The question revolving in his mind began to whirl, to loom large, to become an important matter which he must decide at all cost. Should he give him the ten-rupee note which his fingers grasped in a crumpled ball in his overcoat pocket? He looked round. The little clerk stood expectantly before him, his large head under the round black cap a little on one side. One bare foot out of a black patent-leather slipper was rubbing a bare hairy ankle. One thin hand scratched nervously at a white cotton dhoti-clad thigh. Few Indians, Hugh had discovered, seemed able to stand or sit still. One hand or the other was always exploring the body in unlovely attitudes, or, if the hands were engaged in writing, a foot was jigging, a leg swinging ceaselessly, tirelessly, as if by clockwork.

He could not tip a clerk, he decided, an educated man in an office.

"Well, that 's all, thank you, and good night," he said, suddenly taking the crumpled ten-rupee note from his pocket and slipping it into the little clerk's unresisting hand. His opened palm went up to hide his face in a salute.

"Good night, sir. Thank you, sir. Merry Christmas and lucky New Year, sir." He turned and scurried off up the platform, leaving Hugh alone by the door of the brilliantly lighted carriage.

Hugh looked up and down the platform. At the end of his coach he saw his bearer muffled in all the clothes he possessed, woolen Balaclava cap pulled over his neck, overcoat turned up at the collar, woolen mittens on his wrists. He stood at the door of the servants' compartment exchanging gossip and notes with the others. He was efficient, bustling, and assertive, for, like all his kind, he enjoyed a railway journey more than anything else in the world. He would gather what reflected glory he could by making Hugh a "burra sahib," a wealthy man, a man of fashion who traveled for pleasure alone, taking viceroys, governors, and others in his stride. Tooki Ram was an old hand at the game.

"Sahib! Sahib, bakshish, Sahib!" swelled a chorus at Hugh's side. Hugh looked at the newcomers, bewildered by a confused torrent of words. "I 'm sorry," he said, "I don't understand."

The crowd round him grew. The sellers of fruit, the sellers of red earthenware bottles of drinking

water, the sellers of cigarettes, had suddenly realized that he was a possible customer, defenseless now that the little clerk had gone. They pushed their wares at him, they brushed against him, they thrust hands at him, and all the while the blue-clad chorus of porters drew in round him. They were underpaid, they said. The clerk, a thief, had given them half an anna each when the correct rate was two annas a package. They pointed to their brass badges.

A bell rang; in five minutes the train would go. They redoubled their efforts to extract a feather or two before this unplucked chick escaped from them forever. Hugh looked up and down for Tooki Ram. He had wisely escaped into his carriage. This was nothing to do with him. Soon the train would go and then all would be well. He was studiously hiding himself from Hugh in his little boxlike compartment with wooden seats.

"Sahib, Sahib, bakshish, Sahib!"

Hugh felt in his pocket for change and silver. There was a lull in the storm, complete silence, as all waited to see what the hand would bring up.

An Indian ticket inspector in blue asked for Hugh's ticket. Hugh showed it, and all waited silent and expectant. It was handed back to him.

"Look here," said Hugh, "would you mind asking what all these porters want? I think they want more money, but I don't understand a word."

There was a rattling exchange. The fruit sellers took the side of the porters. Each made the position quite clear as he saw it.

"They say, sir," said the inspector, "that they have only received one half-anna each instead of the rate of two annas each per package."

"What should I give them?" said Hugh, cursing his innocence.

"Oh, give them a rupee," said the inspector indifferently, and went on. These men were no concern of his; if Hugh were fool enough to do it, that was his lookout.

Hugh pulled a rupee out of his pocket and gave it to one of the porters, who slipped off into the crowd. In a moment the remaining four were round him again, importuning, threatening, almost weeping.

"Sahib, Sahib, bakshish, Sahib!"

In desperation Hugh got into his carriage and shut the door, annoyed and ruffled by the thrusting of their importunities into the tenor of the excitement and enjoyment of the evening.

A whistle was blown outside. There was movement and shouting on the platform. The train jolted. Hugh had a vision of begging hands and blue blouses as the lights of the platform began to slip by. In a moment the train was clacking and bumping over the points. It gathered speed, and the arc lights of the freight yards lost their individuality in an indefinite blur.

Hugh set out to look round and to explore the territory of his compartment. Paneled in brown polished teak, it seemed extensive enough. His bed, made up with his own blankets, sheets, pillows, and mattress, was neatly laid out and occupied the seat on one side.

On the other side the seat was empty. Overhead were two bunks that could be let down. He found two armchairs, in each of which he sat in turn.. He felt restless, like a dog in a new house.

He tried the windows, four possible arrangements to each — wooden shutter, wire blind, white-glass window, and blue-glass window. He read the notice under the communication cord, "Penalty for improper use Rs. 50." He even tried the electric fans.

He went into the lavatory and found it tiled and clean, smelling strongly of disinfectant. He liked the shower bath, which looked as if it had never been used.

"Please do not break ice on the basin."

"Please do not stand on the seat."

Hugh went back to the compartment and filled and lit his pipe. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter-past nine. He picked up a book, read for a moment or two and put it down. He looked at his watch again. It was eighteen minutes past nine. He decided he would be more comfortable in bed. He undressed, put on the pyjamas neatly folded on his pillow, went to the lavatory to brush his teeth with soda water from a bottle, paddling over the oilcloth in slippered feet. He got in between the sheets. The motion of the train was smooth. He put out the light and tried to sleep.

He was awakened by lights flashing through the slats of the window blinds and a crashing stop. There were shouts and voices outside. Someone tried the door. The voice of a water seller shouted, "*Hindooo paniwallaaah,*" in a long-drawn call. The engine

whistled. Again the train went on to the clacking rhythmic tune of the bogies over the rails. Again Hugh dozed, to be awakened by the same crashing stop, the same lights, the same man calling water.

At last he slept, and when he woke again the air was keen and biting, and he looked out of his window at the dawn over ragged rocky hills and fields of green cotton, the bolls bursting into white snowy balls.

CHAPTER XII

HUGH lay in his berth watching the countryside go by. Mist lay in the hollows, and the sparse grass was spangled with dew. Along a sand track beside the line three carts loaded high with unginned cotton, fleecy and white, groaned and creaked, the bullocks plodding pair and pair, step for step, unnoticing, apparently effortless, drawing the heavy loads. On the great billowing heaps of cotton the drivers slept, heads swathed in yard on yard of red cotton cloth and ineffectively wrapped against the sharp bite of the dawn air in dirty cotton sheets. A boy cowled in a coarse brown blanket drove goats, black and brown, to pasture. The kids on their knees sucked with urgent pushes and excitedly wagging tails; the big he-goats on hind legs nibbled at the leaves of a thorn bush.

A village near the line sent up thin streams of blue smoke, acrid with the tang of the cow-dung fires. A woman in a dark red sari fetched water in a light red earthen pot. She walked with a smooth gait, balancing the pot on her head, straight as an arrow. On one hip she carried a naked baby, thin-legged and pot-bellied.

The train roared over an iron bridge. Mist lay smoking on the shallow stream, now insignificant in the half-mile-wide sandy bed. In the water a man

naked but for a loin cloth brushed his teeth with a forefinger and squirted water from his mouth.

A little station. They handed Hugh tea, black and syrupy, in a white china teapot, milk, and thick pieces of cold toast, all on a tin tray. Tooki Ram arrived with hot water and beautifully polished brown shoes. He laid out Hugh's clothes, pressed and neatly folded as if there were no such things as trains and railways. Hugh as he drank his tea heard him stropping his razor.

The servant left the carriage, taking the tray. As the last of the station buildings slipped by, Hugh, feeling as if all the dust in Asia had settled in his hair and eyes, rose to bathe and shave, wash and dress.

Feeling clean and freshened, Hugh sat and watched the countryside unrolling in an endless frieze. It flowed smoothly and unchanging before his eyes. The same cotton, cotton, cotton, — acres of it, — interspersed with the same fields of dark yellowish grass and patches of tall millet. The same villages came level and went by in procession, the same ragged-topped hills broke the horizon. The same red turbaned Mahratta farmer rode by on his washy chestnut pony, the same boy for mile after mile drove brown and black goats forever to pasture.

Hugh began to be hungry with an empty gnawing feeling, and he was glad when the train pulled into Itarsi and breakfast. He walked slowly down the platform, pleasantly warm in the early-morning sun. The gravel and feel of the earth under his feet were as strange as if he had been on board ship. He looked

round him with interest as one who has come to a far country. Even to his unpractised eye the people were strange and new — the very police wore the uniform of another province.

He found the refreshment room, high, cool, and dark, unoccupied but for a waiter or two. He took his seat at a table. They brought him a breakfast such as he had never imagined — porridge and fish, eggs and mutton chops, with curry to finish with if he wished. As he drank his coffee he had leisure to take in the room, the hung punkahs, the big glass-fronted cupboards filled with different brands of whiskey and variously colored liqueurs, with tinned salmon and patent medicine, with biscuits and shaving soap.

Hugh had reached the stage of spreading toast with marmalade when he looked up to see a man enter through the wire fly-proof doors and take his seat at a table. He struck Hugh as being familiar in some way. He bore a resemblance to someone he knew, but he could not say to whom. He was obviously Eurasian, his skin deeply pigmented and his hair black and coarse. He appeared to be somewhat older than Hugh.

Hugh tried to catch his eye to glean some spark of recognition, but somehow he was unable to meet the man's glance, although in the intervals when he dropped his gaze for convention's sake he felt himself being stared at. Hugh watched patiently. He saw him take a cigarette from his case, hold it concealed in his left hand as he felt in his pocket with his right for matches, tap the cigarette thrice on the match box and

place it between his lips, still concealed in the palm of his left hand. The right hand operated the match box unaided, withdrew a match and struck it with a gesture so familiar that the name came tumbling to the edge of Hugh's memory. He knew the man, but the name still eluded him. The cigarette was lit behind a shading hand, the match deliberately blown out and held up as he regarded it thoughtfully for a moment. A flick of the wrist and it flew buzzing like an angry bee across the room.

"Lamont," said Hugh to himself. He had seen only one man do that trick, and memories came to him of guest nights in mess after dinner in the Reserve Battalion of the Herefords during the War — Lamont, slight, but hard and sunburned, doing tricks of all kinds. Hugh had not known him very well personally, but he had had an enviable reputation in the regiment as a boxer and gymnast. Yes, Lamont — that was it. Hugh looked across at him, to find Lamont's eyes quickly removed from his face and lowered to his plate. Hugh had an uncomfortable feeling that Lamont had recognized him.

Hugh pushed back his chair, which grated noisily on the cement floor, and went across the room.

"Excuse me," he said, "but your name is Lamont, isn't it? Possibly you don't remember me. My name is Ranken, and we were in the Reserve Battalion of the Herefords together."

"Yes, my name is Lamont, and I remember you perfectly." The reply was made in a surly fashion, which surprised Hugh, for he could see no reason for

it. "Yes, I remember you perfectly, but I was not sure that you would want to remember me — at least, not in this infernal country."

Hugh looked at him, completely taken aback.

"Oh, come!" he said. "I always like meeting people again. What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I am traveling, just as you are. I saw you on the platform in Bombay, but you did not recognize me, and I assumed that you would not want to be seen talking to a chi-chi."

"Oh, rot!" Hugh replied. "What has that got to do with it? Of course, the fact is I did n't see you."

Hugh wondered at the other's rather belligerent and disgruntled manner. Here was a man who obviously had a grievance, but what or why he could not fathom.

"Of course you did not see me," said Lamont sarcastically. "Why should you? When I was in the regiment no one knew that I was Eurasian, — and in any case that kind of thing does n't matter in England, — but out here in my own country I 'm just another nasty blacky-white chi-chi on the subordinate staff of a firm of boxwallahs, and no one wants to know me."

"Are you going by this train, sir?" said an inspector, putting his head in at the door. "Five minutes more, gentlemen."

Outside a bell rang clear and sharp.

"Are you going on?" asked Hugh.

"Yes, I have to go on. You had better go back to your carriage. Well, good-bye." And Lamont rose with his hands in his pockets.

"But you 're going on," said Hugh. "Let 's travel

together. I 'd like to talk — I 'm pretty tired of being alone."

Lamont laughed bitterly.

"If you were me you 'd have grown used to that kind of thing. Anyway, you travel first and I go second, so we had better say good-bye now."

Hugh began to realize what forces were at work in this man's mind. He had a grudge against the world and he was ready to imagine a slight and to take offense at anything, however harmless. Hugh had not known before, and indeed would not have cared if he had known, that Lamont had Indian blood; but the knowledge now made him more eager to eradicate the sense of grievance under which Lamont appeared to be laboring.

"But there 's no difficulty about the differences in classes. Look here, I 'll come into your carriage and we can travel quite easily together." He took Lamont by the arm and led him unresisting to the waiting train. Together they reached Lamont's compartment and entered. It was as large as his own and only a little less well fitted. The seats were slightly narrower, and there was a centre seat with a back to it.

"Well," said Hugh as he took his seat, "what 's the news?"

"How do you mean — what 's the news?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Hugh, rather lamely. "It 's a long time since we have seen each other, and I 'd like to hear how you are getting along."

He began to regret that he had forced his company on this man who obviously intended to make

matters as difficult as possible. There was no getting away from him now, however. The train had started and he was committed to curing his grievances.

"I suppose I am getting along all right," Lamont replied, "but that does n't matter to anyone but myself."

"Oh, rot!" said Hugh. "What are you doing now?" The warmth of his manner began to tell.

"Well, I told you," Lamont replied rather grudgingly, "I am a subordinate in a firm of boxwallahs. How long have you been out here?" he asked suspiciously.

"About ten days," said Hugh. "You see, I 'm quite new to everything. I am only traveling to see the country."

"Well, I wish you joy of it! I suppose you know what boxwallahs are? I made sure you were in the Army or the Civil Service or something. Boxwallahs are what they call merchants' firms."

"I see," said Hugh. "Did you come out directly after the War?"

"Yes, worse luck," Lamont replied. "If I had known what I was in for you would n't have seen me near this country, family or no family."

"How do you mean — family or no family?" asked Hugh.

"Well, you see, my family are all out here, and if I had ever known anything of conditions I would n't have come."

His manner became easier and more confidential.

"You see, I went home — I call it 'home,' though it

is n't really — but I mean to England, to school, when I was only a kid of nine. My father was with the firm I am with now, Litchmore Brothers, the big engineering stores and merchants' firm in Bombay. He was a Eurasian, too, of course, but they all thought him a sport — he had even got into two of the clubs, and he hunted and was in the Light Horse.

"Well, as a kid I knew nothing of Eurasians and how they manage out here. When the War broke out and I was just leaving school I went and got a commission in the Army. When the War ended I was looking round for something to do, and my father wrote and suggested that I should go into Litchmore's office in Bombay. Well, there was nothing else offering, and so I did. And what do you think I found there?"

"What?" asked Hugh.

"Well, I found my father, although he was as good a man as they could get, on the subordinate staff. He had got so far and he could get no further. I found that I was to go in as a subordinate too. There was no escape. I had to start away down at the bottom. My father, who had been with them for thirty years, was at the beck and call of every boy who came out from home on the covenanted staff, and every one of them had more responsibility than he had. They treated him politely enough, but you can imagine what it was like for me. 'Lamont this' and 'Lamont that,' and never allowed to have an idea of my own."

"Good Heavens!" said Hugh. "Why on earth did you stay?"

"God knows. I suppose it 's this Indian blood in

me. We Eurasians do sit down and accept things, you know. Anyway, there I was, with four years' war service, with never a chance of getting above a certain position on the subordinate staff, and these pink-cheeked kids out from the universities could go anywhere — Bombay office managership, London office, a partnership, with a house in Hampstead and a shoot in Scotland — anywhere.

"My father told me to keep quiet about the Army and about having been at a pretty decent public school, because he said mentioning it would n't do any good. He was very keen I should stay in India. My family has always been out here — there were Lamonts in Wellington's armies and Lamonts in the Mutiny; but what do I care? I wish to God I had never come to this infernal country."

"It sounds pretty awful," said Hugh. "I wonder —"

"I don't know why the devil I should tell you all this," the impassioned voice of Lamont went on, "but you always were a decent chap, Ranken, and when we were in the Herefords I knew there was something about you I had n't got — birth or breeding or something. I could command men and hold them all right because they knew I could box and because they had seen me in action get an M.C., but without these I should have been nowhere. You were different — they followed you like dogs as soon as they saw you."

"Oh, rot," said Hugh uncomfortably. "You were a lot better than I ever could be. But why do you

stay? Why don't you make an effort and get out of it?"

"How can I? I 'm glued firmly to the country now. In any case, my father — he 's dead now — asked me to stay. He wanted it. You see, it 's this way with us. In India we can amalgamate with no one. We Eurasians are a small and scattered body. There are not more than a quarter of a million of us all told in a population of three hundred million. We have almost lost touch with relatives in England, and we have nothing in common with any other race or creed in India. Most of them, like most European nations, regard us as untouchable. We 're outcast from the world. No one can become a Hindu. A Hindu is a Hindu only by being born so. Mohammedans will accept no one not a Mohammedan. We stand isolated and alone. We are debarred from all kinds of things. We can't serve in the Army, and are denied even the right to defend our homes. We are handicapped in business. We have n't even the same right of entry into the Civil Service.

"We need every man we can get to keep our people going. In these days of Indianization it 's the weakest who will go to the wall. Have n't we seen that? Good Lord, Ranken, it makes me sick to look at the way things are going. For years we Eurasians have run the railways and the postal and telegraph services in India, and now we are being pushed out of everything. Maybe as a community we are not fit for much more than that kind of thing, but those jobs have been the close preserve of the Eurasians, and you

can see going on before your eyes the process of the Eurasian going to the wall.

"It 's this Indianization, Indianization everywhere, with never a thought to us, that 's doing it. Look at the railways. We are losing our jobs by the hundred because Simla says that Indians must be employed. Then, when a show like the Indian staff on the South India Railway goes on strike, in come your loyal Eurasians to keep the show going for them. There was a good deal of train-wrecking and general mess-up. As soon as the strike was over out went all the Anglo-Indians again and back came the Indians. What can we do? We can't go on the land in India and become peasants and coolies. We try to live by some kind of European standard. There is no unskilled line of employment for us.

"We 're our own worst enemies — that 's the truth of it. We 're a mediocre lot. There 's a constant drain on the community at both ends. The best of us, those who succeed, go to England, forget India, and achieve respectability in the suburbs, as I would have done myself. Those at the bottom are absorbed back into Indian life again as full-blooded Indians. Their eighth, sixteenth, or thirty-second of English blood is forgotten. They become truly Indianized."

"Is that why you stay now," asked Hugh, "so as not to make a further drain on the community?"

"Well, honestly, I don't know. I don't suppose it is, really. You see, I know the weakness of character of my own people, and I don't honestly like to say that

is my reason. If I had the guts I would cut and clear out — if only for the sake of my children. I am not married and I have n't got any, thank God, but I suppose I may have, and Heaven help them if they have to grow up good little lickspittle Anglo-Indians.

"But I don't know why I should tell you all this, except that I like to get it off my mind. It can't be of any interest to you."

"But it is, indeed," Hugh replied. "It 's of the greatest interest to me, not only as coming from you, but also because it is the kind of thing that I came to India to find out about. You see, I 'm going into politics when I get back home, and it is just what I want to know at first hand."

"Oh, are you?" Lamont laughed. "Well, you have evidently been treating me as a specimen. But, still, that 's better than the way the last Englishman I met treated me!"

"Why, how was that?"

"Oh, he saw me wearing a Hereford tie in Bombay and asked me what the devil right I had to it. Of course, I told him to mind his own business. He kept on at me, telling me it was just what he would expect of a coffee-colored Anglo-Indian, and that it would bring the regiment's name into disrepute to have every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the place wearing its colors. He assumed that I had probably paid a rupee for it in the bazaar without knowing what it was, but now he would thank me to take it off. Well, I asked him what right he had to talk like that, and when I found he was a subaltern in the regiment I told him they had

better manners in my time, and then I gave him my name.

"You should have seen his jaw drop. 'Good Lord!' he said. 'I 'm damn sorry. Are you the Lamont who took off the officer's lightweight in the Army of Occupation assault at arms and then was just beaten by Jimmie Wild in the qualifying rounds of the Allied Services Tournament at the Albert Hall?'

" 'I am,' I said, 'and you may tell the regiment that anyone else who likes to come objecting to me wearing a regimental tie will get a taste of something he won't like.' Lord, I 've had a lot of laughs out of thinking about that since."

Hugh was beginning to understand Lamont. He could readily understand the injury to his *amour propre,* his sense of grievance, and their natural reactions in a man of Lamont's nature — the ungraciousness of his manner in an attempt to show that he required nothing from anybody, and the assertive belligerence assumed to keep his self-respect. Hugh, however, was puzzled about one point. He remembered Lamont as quiet and reserved, and now he spoke with assurance and a certain glibness that told of practice.

Lamont went on.

"Well, Ranken, I 'm very glad to have met you. I get out at the next station, which comes in five minutes now. I suppose you have come out here either to take up the cause of the down-trodden Indian or to travel to the furthest bounds of the Empire. I don't know what your color is, but if you take my tip you 'll espouse us. No one has done it yet, and I

am sure we need someone in England to do it. You get up and talk Anglo-Indian whenever the debate comes round to this part of the world, and you 'll be a made man because you 'll be talking something new."

Hugh laughed.

"I suppose you are in politics too? At least, I should think you are from the way you talk. Anyway, you know your subject."

"Yes, I suppose you may say that I am," Lamont replied. "I am on our Association committee, and I hope sometime for the Bombay Legislative Council."

"Well, I wish you luck. By the by, Lamont, do you happen to know a man called Cross, who I believe was on the Madras Legislative Council?"

Lamont laughed.

"I should say I do. I 've got to go to Ramapet sometime this cold weather to see the old man on Association business. A funny old Madras lawyer as black as his hat which he is always talking through. Oh, you need n't look shocked — we observe differences of color just as much as you do. Why, how do you know him?"

Hugh was surprised, and he could not help showing it — it had never occurred to him that Alie's father was not white.

"Oh, I don't," said Hugh, "but I know his daughter. I traveled out with her in the *Cochin*."

"Poor kid!" said Lamont. "I knew he had a daughter, but I did n't think he 'd be fool enough to bring her out. And he 's got money, too; but since

his wife died he seems to have gone to pieces quite a lot. He talks more rot than usual, and his business has fallen away. Well, here 's my station."

Lamont put on his hat and rose.

"Well, good-bye, Ranken," he said. "It 's been very nice meeting you, and I hope we meet again."

"So do I," Hugh responded. "Good-bye, Lamont, and good luck to you."

They both got out on to the platform and started to walk back in the warm sunshine to Hugh's carriage.

"My belief is, you know, that Mrs. Cross pushed the old man on," said Lamont as Hugh got in. "He never did any good after she died — or so my father told me."

The train moved on again and Hugh went back to his seat. Somehow he was disturbed. He had never pictured Alie's father as "as black as your hat." Somehow it changed the situation, although he could not see quite why. He began to wonder how he would find Alie when he saw her again — whether disgruntled and dissatisfied like Lamont, or — well, what alternative could there be? She would hate it. Poor Alie, with the jaunty toss of her head as she threw her hair back out of her eyes!

He would go to Ramapet. Of course she would be glad to see him — and to the clack of the wheels his imagination tasted the sweets of her gratitude.

CHAPTER XIII

THE row of officers' quarters in the British Infantry lines at Islamabad lay warming their red bricks in the early Sunday morning sun. They consisted of a row of small flat-roofed brick bungalows, each as like its neighbors as it was possible to build it. Each bungalow consisted of two quarters, each quarter had its verandah, its big bed-sitting room, its dressing room, and its bathroom. Each little bungalow lay in its own little dusty tussocky compound, surrounded by a wire fence on concrete posts, which contained also a row of servants' quarters and stables.

They were not ugly quarters, but they showed lack of imagination and signs of the fact that their occupants realized that they might have to leave at a moment's notice. The gardens were untended — in some period in the past someone had planted a few cannas, a croton or two, and some bougainvillæa. The cannas still did their best to flower — a rather dismal best, it was true. The crotons straggled wildly, and the bougainvillæa unrestrained made great magenta blobs in the landscape.

The December air had a snap in it which made the Colonel's chestnut mare dance on her toes as she was led down the road by her syce. Out of the sun it might be called cold; in the sun it was pleasantly

warm. There was very little movement on the lines that Sunday morning. Two horses stood saddled in front of one of the little bungalows, the syces giving the saddlery a last rub. A servant carried well-polished shoes and a tray of tea into a bungalow where the occupant was taking advantage of Sunday for a long lie. The orderly officer for the day, belted and sword-girt, strolled up to mount the headquarters guard. An Indian assistant surgeon in uniform bicycled on his way to the transport lines. The two horses were mounted and ridden off at a walk, one under a white sun helmet, the other under a khaki. A white fox terrior sniffed at a telegraph post and contemptuously scratched the dust by the roadside.

Hugh Ranken came out of one of the bungalows and stood on the verandah steps facing towards the jagged line of Deccan hills. He stayed for a moment to look out over the wide expanse of the polo ground. To the right of it lay the long low lines of the barrack buildings, over which the kites wheeled screaming and whistling. A flash of metal caught his eye and a crash of sound announced the fact that the massed bugles of the regiment were sounding the half-hour call for church parade. He turned and strolled over to the mess for breakfast.

The mess lay by itself, a single-story building. It, too, was of red brick, and flat-roofed as were all the buildings in the barracks. In plan it differed little from other messes throughout India — verandah, anteroom, dining room, and billiard room. In furniture, it was a regimental museum of trivial interest.

Medals bedded in velvet under glass adorned the walls, with heads of game and pictures of indifferent merit portraying deeds of the regiment and its past uniforms. On the mantelpiece was a priceless bronze astrolabe which had been looted by the regiment from the Summer Palace in Pekin in the war of 1856. Looting had not been allowed — indeed, the regiment prided itself on the emptiness of its haversacks on its return from that war. One man had been flogged for having been found with a piece of gold brocade in his possession. The thousand-year-old bronze astrolabe, however, seemed to come into a different category. No one knew anything about its use, and because it did not seem to have a market value it was thought that there could be no harm in keeping it. They wanted a souvenir of their visit to the palace of the emperors, and this particular article seemed to be sufficiently valueless to be that souvenir. The colonel at the time, old "Baggy" Yates, was a deeply religious and thoroughly conscientious man. He thought long about allowing the regiment to take even a valueless piece of junk, but he gave in in the end. The astrolabe, fitted with a container for alcohol, now served as a cigar lighter.

Hugh went into the dining room. There were two officers in uniform just finishing breakfast. Hugh wished them good morning and, sitting down, looked at the porcelain menu and called for a servant.

"You 're up early, Ranken," said Hamilton, putting down *Punch*. "Are you coming on church parade with us?"

"I think so," said Hugh. "I tried to get Fontyn out of bed to come, but he would n't."

"I should think not," said Melhuish, over the *Pioneer,* "and you would n't either if you had to get up at five every morning. Good Lord, there 's the quarter bugle! Come on, Hamilton, I 'll give you a lift up to B Company lines in my car."

"You know where to go, don't you, Ranken?" Hamilton asked, looking in from the verandah, where he was passing the brace of his belt under the shoulder strap of his tunic. "It 's the church down in the old cantonments just down the road. It 's only about half a mile from here. And don't be going to the R. C. church which is on the way."

"Yes, I think I can find it, thanks," said Hugh. "The service starts at ten, does n't it?"

"Yes. It 's nearly half-past nine now. Well, good-bye, and be good."

Hugh finished his breakfast and left the dining room. He went to stand on the verandah to fill and light his pipe, and as he did so he heard the throb of drums as the band started to play the regiment down to church. He walked out into the sunlight and down the shady road. He wanted to arrive before they did and to see them march into church.

The way to the old cantonment lay down a road shaded by neem trees. The new lines had been built on the outskirts of the old, and, whereas in the new cantonment there was hardly a bush, the old cantonment was heavy with shade trees dappling light on the huge old rambling bungalows. In the gardens of

these old houses, savoring of generations long gone and forgotten, the grey and white squirrels chirring like electric bells chased each other in the dust, at the first sign of danger, and the hoopoos, gold-crested and solemn, strutted amongst the flowerpots. King Solomon, Hasrat Suleiman bin Daoud himself, gave the hoopoos, at their urgent appeal, their feather crests to replace the golden crowns presented to them by God, for the sons of men were killing the hoopoos in their greed for gold.

Hugh reached the church with its well with an earthen ramp where on week days the big white Nagore bullocks drew the water in leather bags and emptied it into the stone runnels to water the dry earth. The church was old as European things go in India, — that is to say, it was built some hundred years ago, — and its weathered bricks and simple design gave it a real dignity. Hugh stood for a moment savoring the last of his pipe and knocked it out thoughtfully on the gatepost. As he did so the roll of drums crashed in his ears. The fifes shrilled their march. It was familiar, although Hugh did not know its name, only the words to which they used to march to it during the War: —

Call out the Army and the Navy.
Call out the blooming rank and file.
Call out the blinking Territorials —
They 'll face it with a smile.
Call out the boys of the old brigade
Who made old England free.

Call out your mother,
Your sister or your brother,
But for God's sake don't call me.

As he hummed the familiar words the head of the column, with a flash of polished instruments and a flourish of drumsticks, swept around the corner. The sergeant drummer with whirling silver staff headed the column of marching men. The movement of the feet, the tramp of boots, the precise swing of arms, had a hypnotic effect.

The band wheeled into the church compound and off the roadway, opened ranks and countermarched, still playing. The column marched on, taking their rifles with them into church — a survival of custom dating from that Sunday evening in Meerut in May 1857 when the 60th Rifles were to have been surrounded and massacred in cold blood as they attended church. It was only the fact that the sound of the church bell deceived the mutineers into thinking the service was under way that made them break out prematurely. Ringing of bells is part of Hindu temple worship, and the reason for the error was apparent. They found the Rifles parading.

The last man disappeared into the dark shadow of the door, the sergeant drummer held his staff aloft and two beats of the bass drum in quick succession ended the march. The bandsmen fell out and with their instruments filed into church. A little knot of half a dozen were left behind, whom the sergeant drummer addressed.

"Now then, let me see them brass shells cleaned proper by the time I come out, and if I see so much as a spot of black on them pipeclayed ropes I 'll 'ave the 'ides off you, and don't you forget it. And I don't want no smoking, neither. Just remember where you are. You 're in the 'oly rood."

The sergeant drummer left them, and they immediately set to work on the drums. Hugh stood and watched them as a detachment of Gunners from the Artillery lines wheeled into the church compound. He stood aside to let them pass, and as he did so he spoke to one of the bandsmen.

"Are n't you going in?" he asked.

The man sprang to attention and replied, "No, sir. We 're the Carthlics and other denominations. We don't go into church, sir."

Hugh, wondering at the ways of the Army, followed the last of the Gunners into the cool dark of the church. He found it full; all he could see were the rows of close-cropped heads. The church orderly, one of the Herefords, took him in charge and led him to a seat in the second row where were already seated various officers' wives. The Colonel's wife nodded at him from across the aisle.

Hugh bent his head, following convention, and then, straightening up, he had time to look round. The band, grouped behind the choir seats, were playing a voluntary under the baton of the bandmaster, who was keeping a sharp eye open for the arrival of the chaplain. The choir seats were occupied by the drums and boys, under the eye of the sergeant drum-

mer. They sat, with hair carefully brushed, sucking their teeth.

The voluntary on reed and wood and wind came to a close as the chaplain made his appearance and took his seat. The congregation rose with a clatter.

"Hymn number sixty in *Ancient and Modern* and number fourteen in the little red books. The sixtieth hymn, 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.' "

The service had begun.

Hugh did not attend very carefully. He liked hearing hymns sung with vigor, but the whole idea of sending the Army to church as a parade seemed to him to be a wrong one. Unless, of course, it was regarded just as a drill, and then there might be something in it. Thinking of it purely in that light, there really might be something in it. They gave chaplains commissions as captains, and a chaplain was just as much part of the military machine as any other officer, and in the same position as far as ramming his opinions down men's throats.

"Ah-h-men."

A clarinet piped a thin, sanctimonious, tremulous note.

"If we say that we have no sin," piped the chaplain.

Hugh watched him as he repeated the absolution. He saw that his eyes wandered up and down over the heads bent before him. He caught Hugh's eye and turned away hurriedly to intone.

"Praise ye the Lord."

That was it. Hand them over from instructor to instructor. Physical training to musketry to drill;

the schoolmaster had them when he could get them, and the chaplain once a week. Hugh's eyes wandered again and he began to read the inscriptions on the brasses and monuments on the walls: —

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
JOHN ALOYSIUS FECKENHAM
SON OF
COLONEL JOHN FECKENHAM
H.M. 110TH FOOT
DIED OF CHOLERA AT
ISLAMABAD
MAY 25TH, 1879
AGED THREE MONTHS

Sacred to the memory of officers, sergeants, and men who had died during this or that regiment's stay in the station. Hugh's study of the brasses was interrupted for a moment by the efforts of the bandmaster to point the psalms.

Everything in the church seemed to be in memory of someone or something, and everything was clearly labeled so that there should be no mistake regarding the donors.

"I believe," intoned the chaplain, and the boys in the choir seats turned to the East with a crash of heels. Their heads ducked together with the precision of a military movement. The sergeant drummer looked approvingly down the line. He liked to make a movement of it, but he would have to talk to that young Griffiths again, who was always late in making his turn. It was good for them to have these things

done properly. It had scandalized his orderly mind once years ago during the War when, as a corporal, he had noted one man who had not turned when the others had turned. Coley, that was his name — a good drummer and a clean soldier. He had sent him up to the Adjutant, and Coley told the Adjutant that he did n't hold with turning to the East for the "I believe," and for some reason the Adjutant, who, after all, was only a temporary, had let him off. The sergeant drummer shuddered at the very recollection of it. He 'd speak to that young Griffiths afterwards — and he eyed him balefully as the creed came to an end. They had been carefully schooled to make the turn — one, two! — on the first sound of the "I" in the "I believe."

"Inwards turn — one, two!" said the sergeant drummer under his breath as the boys resumed their normal positions again. "That 's better," he thought. The Trinity held positions in his mind equivalent to a general and his staff officers, and above all They must be impressed with the smartness of the Herefords, who were produced for inspection once a week.

The chaplain moved across to the chancel steps. The men settled themselves in their places with sighs and a creaking of seats — to enjoy a quarter of an hour without movement. The Colonel settled himself to think of a scheme for treating the splints in his chestnut mare's off fore, his wife to thinking of whether Frances at school in Bournemouth should be allowed to take up the piano as an extra. The Adjutant wondered how he could tactfully suggest to the sergeant

major that he suffered from halitosis, and the sergeant major wondered whether he could tell the Adjutant that his turban was not folded exactly regimentally. The men — mostly they thought of nothing. Their minds were comfortable blanks, for to think is to be uncomfortable; and you don't, they had often been told, come into the Army to think — you come into the Army to do what you are told.

And so the chaplain, thought Hugh — was n't he there to relieve you of having to think of how to order your life? A kind of religious adjutant, the authority who had you at his mercy to pass on the Almighty's orders once a week.

"Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," began the chaplain.

The sergeant drummer flexed his mental muscles to try to understand what was said to him. He was a religious man and never swore, to him the most deadly sin; but he could not help wondering how "them Carthlics" were getting on with his drums already shining like gold.

"Love God — honor the King — do what you are told — soldiers in God's Army —"

"All propaganda," thought Hugh; "but if you are going to send soldiers to church as a parade, why not drive the lesson home to the limits of your ability?"

"And now to — " intoned the chaplain again.

The regiment rose with a clatter, picked up its rifles, and filed out. Outside in the sunshine someone was shouting for company markers; inside the church there were dusk and stillness. Hugh picked up his

sun helmet and walked across to look at the brasses and monuments. He did not wish to have to talk to anyone at that moment, and he wanted to give the regiment plenty of time to get clear before he started his walk homewards.

As he moved slowly down the aisle his eye was caught by a heavy monument in black and white marble in the best style of seventy years ago. It bore all the emblems of war and death, a draped flag, a sword, and a pile of cannon balls surmounting a skull. The tablet itself was coffin-shaped. Hugh stopped to read the inscription and with a start of recognition he realized that it was dedicated to Colonel Miles Cross. The name, familiar as it was, brought recollections of Alie. He knew that her great-grandfather had been killed in the Mutiny somewhere in these parts. He read the inscription with interest: —

IN MEMORY OF
COLONEL MILES CROSS
OF THE
BOMBAY STAFF CORPS
COMMANDING THE XLTH SURAT FUSILIERS

Born January 17th, 1793, he was Murdered by the Rebels on June 30th, 1857, aged 64. Beloved of those under him, Respected by his Brother Officers, and Trusted by his Superiors, he was Erect and Just in all his Dealings. A Courageous Soldier and an Honourable Gentleman, he died a true Servant of Her Gracious Majesty the Queen and of the Honourable East India Company.

Erected to his memory by his Sorrowing Brother Officers of the Bombay Staff Corps.

England and Asia hand in hand,
Bereft beside his bier,
Sad, sorrowing both, they stand
And o'er him shed a tear.

Hugh, as he stood in front of this memorial, pondered on what sort of man Alie's great-grandfather had been. Short or tall? Tall and side-whiskered, probably, lean and bronzed, like the engravings of the period. Somehow the picture did not fit. Alie's father was "as black as your hat!"

Hugh strolled out into the sunshine. Far away up in barracks he heard the sweet notes of a bugle: —

Letters from Lousy Lizzie,
Letters from Mary Jane.

So the home mail was in. Eagerly he hurried back to the mess.

CHAPTER XIV

For two months Hugh made his headquarters at Islamabad, reveling in the brilliant sunshine and sharp cold air of the Northern India winter. He traveled to Peshawar and the Khyber Pass, where he spent a week with a man he had only met for an evening at the Hereford mess. There was snow at Landi Kotal, and for a day they climbed the high passes under armed escort to shoot chikore, the hill partridge.

From Islamabad, again, he went to stay with a Mohammedan landlord of some thousands of acres and three villages in a remote corner of the Punjaub. There he found something new to him in the way of a community, for the landlord himself was not only owner of the land and the villages, but virtually the director of his people's lives. He alone ordained who should marry whom, what crops should be put where.

His son was an officer in a cavalry regiment. In Hugh's presence he treated him with fond contempt. He sent him out of the room while they discussed the more intimate social customs of the district.

"We cannot have these young men here while you and I, Sahib, talk of these things," he said, and his son, a fiercely black-bearded youth of fifty, meekly left the room and shut the door.

During those two months Hugh thought often of

Alie. Sooner or later he knew he must go south, for he knew that he was to be asked to stay with Colonel Huskisson, who was political agent to the native state of Melur. Melur was close to Ramapet and to Alie. He might have gone to Ramapet at once, but Ramapet was fifteen hundred miles away and it seemed too far to travel with even Alie as his sole objective.

At length he received his invitation to Melur and he tore himself away from the easy, snug existence of regimental life. He left himself plenty of time to get there, for he had plenty to do on the way. Urged by a sense of duty, he was going to see all there was to see, for he pictured his embarrassment years later if he had to admit to having omitted anything.

He tore himself away with some regret from riding someone else's polo ponies three times a week and from Sunday-morning duck shoots. He knew that he would miss the nights in mess, where, with all mention of politics, religion, women, and work taboo, the talk ran in well-ordered, shallow, effortless grooves.

He went round the men's messes on Christmas Day with the Colonel, sampling roast pork, beer, and plum pudding until he felt that he would never want to see food again. He helped at the Children's Christmas Tree in the afternoon and held up the sticky offspring of sergeants' wives to see the candles. He dined decorously in mess on the only night in the year when women are permitted inside those chaste portals. He took pleasure in the scarlet and blue of the mess kit, the flash of medals and the air of festivity.

He saw the New Year in at the Club dance — and

left the following day feeling that he was leaving home.

He took the mail for Agra, for the Taj Mahal, he knew, was a place which everyone ought to see. He spent three days in a hotel in Agra, miserable and lonely after the comradeship of the mess. Dutifully he visited the Taj by moonlight, in company with shoals of fellow tourists. He was politely asked to stand aside out of the vision of a camera taking a slow exposure by moonlight.

At Amritsar Hugh missed by a day the contents of a round-the-world-cruise ship flurrying through the sights of India in ten days. At Delhi he found four days' peace with a man to whom he had a letter of introduction. On again to Ajmere, so fascinating in name, but in reality little more than a cindery, sun-baked collection of railway workshops — and so to Udaipur.

The hotels he stayed in were no sooner left than forgotten. Flashman's at Rawalpindi, Nidou's at Lahore.

At Jaipur he picked a hotel blind. He arrived early in the afternoon, his eyes full of cinders, and was promptly surrounded by a mob of taxi drivers and others, each touting for the hotel he represented. Hugh drove off to his choice, weary and hot, followed by shouts of "Bedbugs there, Sahib!" "Dirty sheets, Sahib!" "Fleas!" from the disappointed ones.

It was in the train to Allahabad that he met a man who loftily remarked, "Well, of course, you can say what you like, but you have n't seen India until you have seen the South and traveled through the temple cities on the Coromandel Coast."

Hugh did not like to admit that he did not know where the Coromandel Coast was.

> On the Coast of Coromandel,
> Where the early pumpkins grow,
> In the middle of the woods
> Lived the Yonghy Bonghy Bo,

was all that he could think of.

"Do they really grow early pumpkins there?" he asked, rather fatuously.

The man looked at him suspiciously.

"I don't really know — I expect so," he replied vaguely. He hated to admit that he had been touring India for only two months himself, and when the dining-car waiter spoke to him in Hindustani he said, "No good trying him in Tamil, I suppose?"

Rather reluctantly, Hugh turned his attention South, although South would take him to Melur, Ramapet, and Alie. He was determined to see what he could, but he found the idea of Alie alluring, and more so as the distance between them shortened.

He idly turned the pages of his guide to pass the time and looked at pictures of Madura, Tanjore, and Tinnevelly. He found Allahabad dull and hurried South, taking a ticket for Calcutta. He was eager to see Keith again and to enjoy the refreshing richness of his fat chuckle. On arrival he telephoned the *Times*, only to discover, to his disappointment, that he had left the night before for Delhi.

He had a card from someone on the *Cochin* who

lived in Calcutta, but that was two months ago and he had probably forgotten. He hunted for the card, and was relieved when he could not find it. Three days later he was on his way to Madras.

CHAPTER XV

Louisa Cross at seventy-seven was little changed from the woman who had made her home with Albert Edward and Alie's mother at Ramapet twenty-five years before. Physically she was a little fatter and more shapeless. Her bosom swelling from the triple kingdom of her chin fell forward in an unbroken line to meet the protuberance of her stomach, whence her skirts dropped in the only straight line in her figure to the floor. Her brown beady eyes flickered from the huge expressionless area of her lead-colored face. Her hair she wore in a grey tight little bun grown smaller with advancing years.

As she sat in her chair, her legs a little apart, a hand hanging loosely in her lap, one would have assumed in her a perfect mental lassitude. This, however, was far from the case. She had cultivated the habit of complete command over her menfolk and household — not by any energetic means, but by a slow, reptilian enveloping of the opposer. She broke down opposition with her yielding strength, and in the end the opposer found that she had triumphed. So her husband, John Cross, fifteen years in his ornate tomb, had found. So had her son Albert Edward. So indeed had Evie, Alie's mother, despite the fact that she, strong-minded woman herself, had struggled in those

enveloping coils until the day of her death. Evie had never known when she was beaten, and only on one major question had she ever won a point — when it was decided that Alie should go to Europe. If Evie had lived and had her way Alie would have stayed there for life. In this, too, Louisa in the end had had the final say — Alie was brought back to India.

Agatha at eighty-two did all she was told, but of course Agatha was no match for anyone. With her blank eyes behind which hung the dark curtain of terror and something approaching idiocy, she was no more than a child. She always did as she was told.

As Louisa had with the others, so indeed would she now impose herself on Alie by slow degrees, gently, gently, soft as snowflakes, a pat here and a pat there — Alie would find that Grandma's word was law and her will inexorable. If Alie submitted, all the better for her; if not — well, Grandma hardly contemplated that.

The old woman in rusty black sat in her chair by the table in the darkened parlor whence she could see the dusty road, deserted in the blazing sunshine. She scratched fiercely at an itching spot in her scalp and relapsed again into her usual stillness. Behind her half-shut eyes she was pondering the problem of Alie. A fly settled on her forehead and started to explore near the sparse roots of her hair. One almost expected her tongue to shoot out and take it, as if that were the reward for which she sat so still, but she did not move. Mere flies did not bother Louisa.

There was no sound in the house at this hour of

three o'clock in the afternoon except the dry rustle of the tiny feet of the little grey lizards, so like Louisa in color, which scuttled across the bamboo matting of the verandah. Outside in the hot garden a grey palm squirrel chirred angrily like an electric bell.

Soon the household would come to life. First of all would come the sound of the mali rattling his cans, padding in the dust to water the pot flowers in the compound. Then would come the clinking of cups in the butler's pantry as Sam began to get tea. Now he was lying asleep on the pantry floor with his head pillowed on his dirty white turban. His mouth was a little open, and a mouse swizzled his nose at him in curiosity from under the ice box.

Such afternoons had unfolded themselves comfortingly the same for years. Agatha now lay asleep on her bed in the next room, a formless lump in her grubby white shift. She would awake as she always did, whimpering for her tea, to receive Louisa's scolding to be a good girl now. Poor Agatha! Louisa's half-shut eyelids snapped open at the idea, and her beady eyes faced the world of dust and sunshine through the door. Poor Agatha, indeed, who lived in a world of her own, without a worry as Louisa knew worry! What did it matter to Agatha whether she got her way or not? Louisa of the stubborn will allowed her eyelids to droop gently back into position and her body to relax.

Her thoughts ran on. Poor Agatha!

And then would come tea, rich, syrupy, and strong, diluted to mud color with the grey buffalo milk nau-

seatingly pungent in flavor to the ordinary palate. There would be sugary biscuits, too, with Agatha asking for a second and begging for a third.

"Agatha, I tell you you have two now, is n't it? You must not be a greedy girl."

Louisa knew that she could torment Agatha by withholding the sweet biscuits that she loved. She would watch her under half-closed lids searching round for the last crumb. Once, indeed, she had caught Agatha's hand reaching stealthily for a third, and she had rapped her sharply over the knuckles with a teaspoon. That, however, was many years ago, and daily Agatha begged for a third biscuit. Louisa loved them, too, and she would often wait to begin hers until Agatha had finished her second. There were always the same number on the tray, and it never occurred to Louisa to ask for more.

It tickled her vanity and gave her a sense of power to feel that even Agatha depended on her for everything — even down to that one small flyblown biscuit. Heaven knows she had opportunity enough to taste her power in her household and her circle without teasing Agatha, but in nothing could she ever submit to the feeling that she was not paramount. She liked always to reassure herself that the old power was there, despite the fact that there was no one worthy of her steel. Albert Edward and Agatha were classified together, mesmerized into complete and permanent submission. Alie — Louisa's eyes snapped open again. Her body stiffened under the rusty black. Her nostrils distended and she breathed hard and emphatically.

Life had flowed so smoothly since Evie had been taken and put away with such comforting ceremony. Not that Evie had ever but once succeeded in gaining a major point. But now Alie, the very symbol and product of her victory, had returned to struggle with those softly enveloping folds of Louisa's will.

"That chit of a girl!" Louisa's lids slid slowly down, half covering the hard brown agate of her eyes. A parrot's eyes close in much the same way.

She permitted her loose mouth to widen a little in a smile that showed the gaps in her brown teeth.

"Oah, if that child is *zubberdusti* with me I will go *ahisti* and she will do like I tell her, is n't it?"

There would never be a repetition of Evie's victory in sending Alie to England to school — never. Give an inch there, protesting willingness to give all; take a yard there, slowly, slowly, so that none shall know it has been taken until the position is consolidated and encased in an unassailable shell of precedent.

Louisa had always known that there would be trouble from the time that Alie came home. She was prepared for it. Her mind had been wary and wide awake ever since she had enfolded protesting Alie in a huge embrace, giving her a wet smacking kiss.

Alie had arrived from the Bombay mail train in the false cool of one early morning, expecting to be reproved for her clothes, her behavior, her smoking. She had expected, in fact, to be replaced into childhood, for, do what she could, Louisa still represented authority embodied. Louisa expressed no disapproval; she never raised an eyelid.

"*Ahisti, ahisti,*" she was whispering to herself. Alie, taking fresh courage, had been in the house barely five minutes before she expressed disapproval of all she found — of the darkness, of the untidiness, of the hatrack made of black-buck horns, of the moth-eaten tiger skin.

"Ah, Missy Sahib," said Louisa playfully, "after all the fine *belaiyati* things you have had you find our things bad, is n't it? Well, I tell you a girl wants pretty things like us old people don't. I tell you, Alee, you go to the Europe shops and bring some nice pretty things for us, is n't it?"

There had followed two days of activity, of visits to the European shops for furniture and the bazaar for chintz. A limp and damp Alie hauled round in the heat of the day by an inexorable and generous Louisa. The shops of Ramapet had yielded nothing.

"Alee, you must write to Bombay, to Whiteaway Laidlaw, even to the Armee and Navee Stores. My little Missy Sahib must have pretty things, is n't it?"

Continued but waning activity followed. Catalogues, talk. Talk costs nothing, and Louisa felt reasonably safe.

Yes, safe indeed. Nothing had been done. She felt no anxiety about Alie on that score. At first there had been talk of England and all the fine folk she had met, but that had all died away. There had been frequent mention of a man — of that Ranken, as Louisa called him. This had disturbed her, but not for long. Alie, for all her Europe ways, seemed to have settled down.

Louisa hated and feared this freedom that Alie brought with her. In her day it would have brought a girl into trouble quick — but nowadays it was not like then; such a thing did not now happen to girls. But in order to have Alie settle into Ramapet Louisa was prepared to let her act as she pleased — for the present.

And now things were better still, now that that Lamont had come. He could run with Alie as much as he pleased, and if anything happened — well, so much the better, was n't it? He would then marry Alie and she would be fixed forever.

He was a man, that Lamont. Louisa let herself relax — relax, and the waves of sleep mounted to her brain.

Outside in the brilliant sunshine a squirrel ran across the road. In her room Alie lay asleep under a fan that grumbled for oil. Her forehead was damp and her hair stuck to it.

In his office off Lawrence Road, Albert Edward, his feet up on the sleeves of his long Bombay chair, snored a little.

CHAPTER XVI

ALIE lay half asleep in her darkened room, watching the uneven sweep of the groaning electric fan overhead. The wide blades made a pleasant draught. She roused herself to reach for a cigarette from the tin on the table beside her bed, and brushed back her hair from where it stuck to her forehead. She considered whether to rouse herself sufficiently to get up.

She looked at her watch. It was half-past four, and from the big room in the centre of the house she heard the clinking of cups where Sam was bringing in tea. She wondered if getting up was worth the trouble.

She had slept away the long afternoon, and now her mind, more awake than her drowsy body, became crowded with thoughts and vivid memory pictures. She lay back and considered.

The room was dark and shadowy, and the heavy varnished teak bazaar-made furniture did nothing to lighten it. A shaft of dusty sunlight which found entrance through one of the broken wooden slat blinds fell with an accusing finger on the door of the wardrobe, whose catch was faulty and would not stay shut.

The bathroom door was half open, and through it she heard the waterman rattling the square kerosene-oil tins that served him for buckets and the swish of water as he filled the tin bath and the big pottery jar.

Soon would come the soft closing of the door and more rattling of other utensils as the sweeper performed his share of the bathroom tasks.

A fortnight before Alie could not have said what an Indian bathroom was like, but she had realized that she was truly home when she walked into the cement-floored room attached to her bedroom at Ramapet, to be met with the mean, nose-pinching smell peculiar to bathrooms in India in houses where they are not too particular.

For the good reason that the Hindu caste system has provided a race who with broom and incinerator is prepared to do the work that plumbing does elsewhere, it is unnecessary to tie up good money in expensive sewers and water supplies, and sanitation in India has a human touch unknown in the West. The system, however, has its human weaknesses, for even the most abject of mankind may rebel, or even merely sleep and forget — and then where are you? Where, indeed!

The bathroom, however, was the last thing that Alie minded. She had fallen again into the use of a tin dipper and a tin bath almost unconsciously. To call for hot water to be brought in a tin whenever she wanted a bath seemed the most natural thing in the world. No, the bathroom did not offend her.

A fortnight before she had arrived early one morning with Albert Edward. From then on her readoption by the country was more or less complete.

The brick station buildings warmly red in the slanting rays of the early sun, the smell of cardamons and *ghi*, the figures of men like corpses wrapped in white

cotton sheets sleeping on the platform in the chill of the dawn, the half-naked thin man brushing his teeth with the chewed end of a stick, the fat Brahmin ambling by with a small brass waterpot in his hand, the early-morning hawking, coughing, and spitting, the quarreling of the crows on the station roof, all were so familiar that she had no feeling of having been away.

The liquid rush of words that formed Sam's argument with the baggage coolies over annas and pies she understood, although she was unconscious of understanding. It became simply a conversation that she overheard. She was able, she found, to chivy the unfortunate Sam with a very fair brand of the Tamil which she had spoken so fluently as a child.

The rambling house in the big dusty compound was familiar. The walls were still blackened by the damp and the same plaster seemed to be coming off in patches. Inside, every thing of the slovenly comfort was unchanged. Alie, however, viewed the familiar things with a new distaste. The hatrack of blackbuck horns, the moth-eaten tiger skin taken by Albert Edward as part of a bad law debt, the heavy, dusty marble-topped furniture elaborately carved, seemed to Alie to lack any of that Ealing smartness to which she was used.

As soon as they had turned into the compound Alie felt, too, the spell of Louisa, and she began to be defiant to establish her independence. She submitted distastefully to Grandma's embrace and at once tried to see how far she dared go. Those hard brown agate

eyes never winked when she tried out her tricks with whatever foolish little gestures she could produce. Nothing seemed to bother the old lady. Alie could draw no response from under those half-shut lids.

Alie lit another cigarette from the end of the one she was smoking, pressed out the stump in an ash tray, and blew a fresh cloud of smoke towards the sagging white mosquito net suspended from poles above the bed.

She considered idly what she would wear to the Club. Her appearance there had become the important moment of her day. She timed her entrance with care, never so early that she lacked an audience, never so late that attentions were engrossed elsewhere. Poor things, they hardly ever saw anyone properly dressed, and none of the other girls were fit to look at.

That stroll across to a group of empty chairs beside a table covered with old illustrated magazines could make or mar the day. It was done with superb unconsciousness — floating daintily across the well-lit stage, oblivious of admiration and desire in the watching eyes.

Before she could pick up a magazine, before she had settled herself in one of the round cane chairs, one trim leg crossed above the other, men detached themselves from what they were doing. Strolling idly across the lawn, they asked if they might join her. To Ramapet she felt that she was all the unattainable world outside.

She liked to have them all come; all except Geoffrey Lamont — she hated him. She loathed Geoffrey for his facility for catching her unawares, for his cool as-

sumption that he would always be able to make a date with her.

It all started that night a fortnight ago. The Club gramophone was grinding out tunes — they were dancing when she had seen him lounging against one of the big verandah pillars.

"Who 's that?" she asked her partner.

"I dunno," he replied, shrugging his shoulders.

She watched him covertly — he was not like the other young men of Ramapet, who had knubbly wrists and Adam's apples that nothing could hide.

Alie watched him. He was apparently unaware of her as she of him. Her mouth felt a little dry with anticipation and she ran the pointed tip of her tongue over her lips. He would try to catch her eye — he must.

He yawned as she watched him from the corner of her eye. "Let 's sit down," she said to her partner.

They sat in a dark corner of the verandah, the tip of Alie's cigarette glowing furiously in the dusk as she drew at it impatiently.

"She 's a peach, is n't she? I bet you have n't got anything like her in Bombay, Lamont," she heard someone behind her say.

"Like who?" a drawling voice replied. Alie knew it was he. "Like who, indeed!" she thought.

"Why, Alie Cross, of course. Did n't you see the girl in the sort of yellow frock with the pretty legs?"

"Oh, her! So that 's old Cross's daughter?" came the drawling voice again. "Well — I don't know. She 's pretty enough, I suppose. She 's — well, I sup-

pose she 's all right for Ramapet, and if you like that kind of thing. Let 's go and get a drink."

She threw her cigarette away; she looked at her partner to see whether he had heard; she put out a hand on his arm.

"Go and get me a drink, dear. I 'm awfully thirsty."

Sitting alone in the dark, she clenched her hands.

"Damn him, damn him, damn him!" she repeated, and she sought comfort in her powder puff. As she looked in the tiny mirror which made no more than a shining grey ring she tried to examine herself. Only "all right"! She was more than "all right" — she 'd show him.

Even now as she lay in bed in her room in the Cross house the memory of that chance remark rankled. She hated Lamont, but when he came to ask her to dance she did so — but still she hated him. Since then she had seen Geoffrey daily.

She wondered what she should wear. Yellow crêpe de Chine, perhaps? She decided on yellow crêpe de Chine — Geoffrey had said he liked that frock. She threw her legs over the side of the bed. She stretched and yawned. Crossing to the blackwood dressing table, on which the spotted distorting mirror had to be kept in place with a wad of paper, she ran a comb through her damp hair. Through the half-open door into the sitting room came the clink of teacups set on the table. Alie picked up a pink silk wrap and stretched again as she ran her arms into the sleeves, her cigarette hanging loosely from the corner of her

mouth. She flicked the ash off on to the floor. From the other room she heard Louisa's scolding of Aunt Aggie, of Sam, of Sam's assistant.

"Do not be a notty girl again, Agatha." The harsh voice came through the door. "It is always you do not do like I say. If I give you *hukkum* to do such a thing which is a good idea, you go and make such another thing like I have not said, is n't it?"

Aggie started to whimper.

"Oah, Louisa, I say please give me another biscuit. There was only one I have had."

"*Chup,* Aggie, if you will be so with me I will put you to bed. Sam, *ikri, ikri.* Where is the hot water?"

Outside in the bathroom Alie heard the sound of clanking tins and the waterman scolding the sweeper with bitter hissing insults for daring to enter to do his menial tasks while he was pouring bath water. "Maharajah" the waterman called him, the stock sarcasm for the lowest of the low. Alie heard and accepted the varying sounds as all part of home. She slipped her feet into mules and, with the heels slapping as she walked, lounged into the room.

The afternoon sun was low and the dark room was lighted by the slanting rays that found their way across the deep verandah.

Aggie was sitting hunched in her chair close to the table, blowing on her mud-colored tea in the saucer held tremblingly in both hands. Louisa in her black dress sat in the straight chair, one brown hand on the table, the other held loosely in her lap. Her eyes kept

watch as usual. They flickered as Alie entered, veiling the look of discontented dislike. Alie felt those eyes were boring through her as she clapped noisily across the rough bamboo matting on the stone floor. In bravado, her only defense against those intent hidden eyes, she flung herself into a long chair and shouted for Sam to bring her tea. If only Louisa would voice her dislike or disapproval, she would have something tangible on which to declare open war.

Louisa said nothing, and Aunt Aggie sipped her tea noisily.

CHAPTER XVII

ALBERT EDWARD sat, a tubby little figure, in a cane chair on the verandah of the Club and sucked brandy-and-soda off his moustache. Owing to the area to be covered, it was a somewhat complicated operation — which, however, through long practice he was able to perform with both delicacy and expedition. As he sucked he looked out into the garden, his eyes fixed on some distant point. He allowed his thoughts, never very engrossing, to fade away to almost nothing.

He sat with his knees apart to allow the swell of his little pot belly to rest comfortably between his thighs, and with his feet crossed and tucked in under his chair. Keeping his eyes focused on the distant point, he raised his glass again mechanically. The ice in the glass clinked and he noticed with pleasure the stinging little prickles of the soda water and the chill of the liquid. The warmth of alcohol in his brain struck little pin-points of light on his mind.

He saw Alie cross the verandah. There were three men with her — there were always men with her. Albert Edward looked at them with distaste, but beyond that his Alie could go with whom she pleased. He knew a thing or two about her and her Ranken. She had spoken so often of this Ranken that Albert Edward knew that she would marry him. That was

just what he wanted — that she should marry an English gentleman and go to England and be a mem-sahib. He would send her home and pay to keep her there. She would be back where the Colonel had been. Even if he never saw her after her marriage, he would have earned his reward in restoring her to position.

And what a wedding they would have with a Europe cake and champagne and brandy and all Ramapet to see. A grand march to finish up with — "my son-in-law, Mr. Ranken."

They would have a dance. Valeta, Dee Alberts, La Rinka, Maxixe, and Sympathy Waltz. He would sit at the head of the room, — he could take the Club for it, — or maybe he himself would lead the stately Valeta. "My son-in-law — "

He looked at his glass. Somehow it was empty.

"Boy!" he shouted mechanically, and when he judged that the man padding over the cement floor in bare feet stood at his elbow he ordered another brandy-and-soda. His eyes remained on the distant point on the horizon, and he sat waiting for that second brandy-and-soda which would bring him to the state of complete beatification. He would be sober, but nowadays at his age even a little brandy made his tongue trip the least bit over his words.

He used to drink whiskey-and-soda, but he had turned to brandy. "Beehive Brand" was his favorite. You got more for your money from brandy than from whiskey. It lit his blood and made him straighten his shoulders, if only for an hour or two.

The tops of the trees in the Club compound were

lit to gold by the long rays from the setting sun, and from where he was sitting he could see the confused movement of white figures on the Club tennis courts and hear the twang of the racquet in a hard drive. Little Indian boys in khaki shorts ran to pick up the balls.

Down in the compound there was a brick plinth over which reared the stark wooden gallows-like frame which in the hot weather carried a matting punkah pulled by hand. When the weather grew unbearably hot they would wet the plinth with water and the fan would swing overhead, giving a passable impression of coolness. Now, however, there was no need of these devices, but the plinth still made a place to sit, and already the cane chairs were filling up.

Albert Edward lifted his glass and put it down half empty. From where he sat he could see the sweep of the drive leading up to the entrance to the Club and he could watch the stream of cars with an occasional pony trap that came to deposit relaxation-seeking members inside the deep shady porch.

He watched cross the lawn a group of "these Eurasian chaps," as he contemptuously termed them with complete unconsciousness. The Club seemed to take anyone these days, he reflected.

Ramapet Club did indeed take almost anyone these days. Albert Edward thought with regret of the days when he had driven by the Club dumbly envious of its aristocratic and unapproachable interior. Then he had hardly aspired to membership. Now — well, it was an honor scarcely worth having.

With Louisa, however, it was different. She had never grown accustomed to membership, and as a result it was the one place in which Albert Edward felt secure.

Albert Edward heaved a sigh of contentment, and finding to his surprise that his glass was empty he ordered another brandy-and-soda — without ice this time, and not too much soda. The evening was becoming a little chilly and soon it would be time to go in.

Behind him in the Club the lights were going on. From the lawn he heard the sounds of a band. He had forgotten it was the weekly band night, when the Indian Police Band would play selections from musical comedies and finally unbend sufficiently to play three or four dances before packing up and going home.

There was something inspiring about the Police Band — not in the music they played or the way they played it, but in the fact that they played at all. They were taught a tune "by numbers" — that if one blew in a certain way and pressed a certain key a certain note would result. When that had been learned each instrument was taught its part separately. They were then allowed to combine into the glorious whole. The conductor's baton was merely a symbol, for no one watched it. Each instrument was too intent on his own part. The music came dragging, halting, rather pathetic.

Albert Edward listened. They were playing his favorite piece and he was held entranced by the ethereal music. It was "Woodland Echoes." The first

cornet had been sent away to stand in the shadow of the trees near the incinerator where the Club garbage was burned. The band under the flaring lamps played the melody, a wailing slow harmony of cornet, horn, and clarinet, to be echoed in the distance by the first cornet playing solo.

The distant echo stood in the darkness waiting for his cue. He shook some spittle out of his instrument. The music came to an end. Parting his black beard, he placed the instrument to his lips. He could see the lights of the Club, the expectant faces of his comrades, instruments poised, and the weaving of the bandmaster's baton.

He shut his eyes and blew.

"Ta tee ta ta."

"*Aik-do-teen-char* — one — two — three — four."

"Ta tee ta teeee."

"*Aik-do-teen-char.*"

The exquisite melody poured out as the black-bearded nightingale expanded his lungs and blew. The bandmaster winced as the culminating top note began in a tremulous falsity which somehow recovered.

Up on the verandah Albert Edward sat entranced.

There was a scraping of chairs and a rustle of movement as the Club stood up for "God Save the King." The dancers on the floor stood with unloosed arms and in his corner Albert Edward swayed a little on his toes. He put out a hand to a pillar to steady himself and almost before the last bar ended he sank back into his

chair. There was a hum of conversation, and a movement for the door. Down in the garden the members of the band were collapsing music stands and struggling to house the bass drum in its canvas case. Their toes wriggled in their heavy leather boots, thinking gratefully of soft slippers and the informal ease of police lines. The bandmaster descended from the wooden soap box on which he had been standing and made for the steward's room at the back of the Club. He was wondering if he would be able to wheedle a whiskey-and-soda out of the secretary.

The Club was emptying rapidly. Albert Edward peered uncertainly at those departing, wondering where Alie could be. He looked uneasily at the clock. It was a quarter past eight. He knew what awaited him at home if he delayed longer; but he knew what Alie would say if there was no car to take her home.

He subsided weakly in his chair and ordered another brandy-and-soda.

The Club was nearly empty. From the bar came an occasional burst of laughter from the small group of boys from the Police School, who had decided to make a night of it. The servants were putting out the lights in the reading room and the ballroom. They stood expectantly waiting for Albert Edward to move. A servant crossed the room carrying his turban in his hand and wearing a dirty striped shirt instead of the Club's white coat. He expected the room to be empty, but seeing Albert Edward hunched in his chair he crammed his turban on to his head and bolted for the door.

Albert Edward's chauffeur peeped at him from the level of the verandah. He wanted to get back and put the car away. He had an engagement with the sweeper's wife, and he knew that Sam, the butler, would take his place if he could get through the Cross supper in time.

Albert Edward glanced at the racing hands of the clock, blurred on the shadowy face. He cautiously and solemnly placed a hand over one eye — somehow he could see better like that. It was a quarter to nine.

There was a movement in the bar. Chairs scraped back. More laughter. The police boys left in a body to seek a scratch meal outside somewhere.

A gusty rage welled up in Albert Edward. Why should n't Alie come? She was somewhere with one of those chaps, but she was going to marry that Mr. Ranken. He would tell her so when she came. She was supposed to be ready to leave the Club at a quarter past eight. Maybe he would n't let her come again.

He called the boy and ordered another drink. The boy departed for the bar.

Why should he worry? Was n't he Albert Edward Cross? Maybe his mother should get angry with him, but why did he care, is n't it?

That chit of a girl was playing with that Eurasian chap, Lamont, was she? He wanted her to marry a European gentleman like that Mr. Ranken, and she should, too. He had money, and maybe he would tell Mr. Ranken all that would be done if he were to marry Alie.

The boy brought his drink. Albert Edward took

the card and wrote his name across it in shaky letters.

He took his drink in his hand and tasted it. A fury seized him.

"Boy!" he shouted, and the words stuck in his throat as the veins swelled.

"Boy!" he cried. The man returned and stood before him.

"*Kya hai?* What is this?" He felt his voice rising and he made no effort to control it. "*Hukum kya hai?* What was the order? Maybe when I say 'brandy' I mean 'whiskey,' is n't it? Maybe you think I am a fool, *kuttya ke bachcha,* son of a bitch!"

The man stood in front of him, tray in hand, grinning foolishly — teetering from one foot to the other. Through the haze Albert Edward saw nothing but the grinning features. He would wipe out that grin. Anger surged through him in hot waves.

He raised his arm and struck the foolish grinning face.

"*Kahin ka!* You fool, you!" he screamed, as he beat at the servant with the ineffective soft blows of a drunken old man.

The man's turban fell off as he turned and fled.

Albert Edward stood swaying on his feet. So he was someone, and there was his girl playing with all the men in the place. He would see.

He tried to push out his chest and almost overbalanced in the effort. He tried to swagger across the room.

He, Albert Edward Cross, would fetch his girl and make her go home.

Suddenly before him Lamont appeared, hard and square in outline, with Alie shadowy behind him.

"Look here, Mr. Cross," said Lamont, "you 'd better come home. Come on, sir." He advanced towards Albert Edward.

Albert Edward saw his chance. This man would keep his Alie from marrying Mr. Ranken. A sob broke from him. His poor little daughter!

He swung his open hand and landed a satisfying smack with all his puny force on the hard brown jaw.

Lamont stopped dead. There was silence. Albert Edward's rage went from him and his brain cleared. His courage oozed.

Lamont's tongue moved over his upper lip. The red mark left by Albert Edward's fingers showed up raw and angry on his cheek. He seemed to be pausing just to see where he could drive him the most punishing blow.

Albert Edward screamed and covered his face with his hands. He wondered what the blow would feel like. His courage had gone.

Lamont laughed.

Albert Edward felt himself lifted bodily by powerful arms and carried out. He felt himself put into the car. He subsided, weeping the futile tears of a drunken old man. He felt very sick.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Residency at Melur was built on a hillside above the city. From the deep verandah one looked across over the uneven line of housetops and minarets to the solid pile of the State College and to the trees which half hid the Maharajah's palace. Beyond that lay a long hogbacked hill, rocky and bare, and beyond that over forty miles of red-earth tillage to the line of the Nilgiris. The Nilgiris, — the "Blue Hills," to translate their name, — lying piled up tier upon tier, their feet in dark green forest, their tops from the six-thousand-foot line clear grassland, really were blue, somewhat to Hugh's surprise. They changed color with every hour of the day, from smoky blue in the early morning to pale grey-blue in the strong light of midday to dark rich purple at evening. Forty miles away on the other side lay the Anaimallais, the "Elephant Hills," but they never showed the same quality of blueness as the Nilgiris eighty miles across the valley.

Hugh arrived at the Residency by train early one morning — as he seemed to arrive anywhere in India. He took his bath and with only a towel round him he stood on the soft white Japanese matting on the verandah and watched the magic of the hills. The comfort of a big, well-ordered house closed in on him — even his boy was smarter, more subdued in talk, look-

ing after him better, giving him cleaner shoes, playing up to the atmosphere. In the garden the malis worked efficiently and silently. The policemen standing sentry at the gates did not lounge.

A syce led a horse dark with sweat under the verandah and Hugh heard a step behind him. It was his host in boots and breeches. He held out his hand.

"Well, I am glad to see you," he said. "I 'm Huskisson, of course. They are looking after you all right, I hope. That 's good — that 's good. Have a good journey?"

He spoke his sentences jerkily and bit at his clipped gingery moustache and pulled nervously at the chin strap of his helmet. He was a man of nervous energy who found it hard to keep still.

He moved a brass ash tray into the exact mathematical centre of a round table.

"That 's good," he went on. "Sorry I was n't here to meet you, but I have to get exercise somehow. Looking at the hills? They 're nice, are n't they?" His voice trailed off and he became still as his grey eyes searched the distance. "Oh, they 're good hills. You grow to like them — the Blue Hills."

"Are they always blue like that?" Hugh asked.

"Yes, always blue. Some people say they are called the Nilgiris because of the blue strobilanthes which blooms about once every three years. But I don't believe it myself. They 're just blue anyhow, — you can't get away from that, — and I never saw a native who noticed a flower yet. Well, well — had your bath? Well, so long — breakfast when you like."

He disappeared round the corner of the verandah.

To all independent Indian states of any importance is attached a Resident — a picked man of the political department who acts as the liaison officer between the ruler of the state and the Government of India. In all cases the Resident is adviser on matters of legislation and policy. He has to be a man of tact, and in states where the rulers still make a practice of hanging their erring wives up by the thumbs the Resident's position is complicated in the extreme.

Melur, however, was advanced, and the Maharajah of Melur a polished gentleman. The state was well managed, and the Residency at Melur was regarded as the plum of the political service.

At breakfast Hugh met his hostess. She was gracious and sympathetic.

"Of course you 'll stay a fortnight," she said. "Life won't be worth living here for a week, because everyone will be too fussed for words. It 's the Maharajah's birthday on Tuesday, and the Governor of Madras is coming to visit to-morrow. Why, of course you must stay over. Teddy will be too busy to do much for you until things have quieted down a bit. Yes, of course you must stay — we 'd love to have you. We live in an out-of-the-way corner and we don't get too many people here."

"Well," Hugh replied. "It 's very kind of you — I 'd love to stay — "

"You 'd better call on the Diwan as soon as you can," said the Resident. "He 's a Cambridge man, incidentally — you were at Cambridge, were n't you?

Well, I think you 'll like him. He 'll be glad to see you. I 'll send you down in the Residency car, and I 'll arrange with him on the telephone to see you. I expect it will be sometime about eleven o'clock."

Colonel Huskisson rose from the table.

"Well," he said, "I 've got to go to the office. I suppose you can amuse yourself this morning. We 'll have a game of tennis this afternoon."

Hugh took a book and sat on the verandah with his pipe. The weather was cool, for Melur, lying at three thousand feet, was never unpleasantly hot, and in January the brilliant sunshine was pleasingly warm.

He watched the cloud shadows on the hills and the kites wheeling in the clear blue of the sky. His book lay on his knees, and he relaxed after his long jolting journey in the train. In the shadows behind him Mrs. Huskisson gave orders to the butler. In the garden at his feet two gardeners squatted on their heels and weeded a bed of salmon-colored antirrhinum, digging round the roots and crushing the soil in splay-shaped fingers. They talked in low monotones as they worked.

It was very quiet.

Somewhere near here lived Alie, and Hugh wondered again, as he had done so often in the last six weeks since he had seen her, how Alie was faring. He had written to her frequently and sometimes received replies — he was always glad when he saw the large scrawling of her writing on an envelope. He had forgotten a great deal of the real Alie and remembered

only her ready laughter and her soft yielding when he danced with her.

He got up and fetched his Indian Railway *Bradshaw*. Only two hours away were Ramapet and Alie. He wanted to see her again. It was so easy to make her say, "Oh, Hugh, you are so clever!" He was jealous of the whole tribe of men who had always hung round on the ship — he knew that if he once got Alie away from them he could make her care as he believed at that moment he cared for her.

He tried to picture her life in Ramapet as she had described it.

"You know, Hugh dear, everyone is so silly here. There are only a lot of boys, Hugh, and old men — "

He wanted to see her again.

Colonel Huskisson interrupted his train of thought.

"Oh, Ranken, the Diwan can see you at half-past eleven. The car will be here at eleven to take you down. That 's good. That 's good. Well, I must get along." He disappeared again into the dark cavern of the hall.

Hugh's drowsy thoughts flowed on as he watched the play of shadow and light on the hills turning from blue to blue. Cloud lay in a belt across the range, but above it appeared the tops of hills in clear sunlight, smooth and rounded, distance making light of cliff and valley which would in actual fact take tedious days of precipitous climbing to negotiate.

At half-past eleven he found himself being steered past the scarlet-coated cavalry sentries who guarded the white stone gate to the Maharajah's palace. He

was led through a marble-flagged courtyard where fountains played and into the Diwan's office where the Diwan himself sat behind a wide mahogany desk with a leather top.

The Diwan welcomed him, talking smoothly in the accent of Eton and Cambridge. Where was India? Hugh wondered, as he sat in a big leather chair and lit a cigarette, listening to the warm welcome.

Hugh would not have been surprised if he had been shown into an *Arabian Nights* room, with the Diwan, old and white-haired, sitting cross-legged smoking a hookah. Colonel Huskisson's expression of "seated on the *gadi*," — "on the cushion," — in fact, had conveyed this. Here, however, the gadi, the seat of the mighty, was represented by a very comfortable leather office chair. As usual, what one might have expected seemed to be the most surprising. Hugh marveled at his own naïveté.

"Of course you are going to stay for the Durbar — I will see you get invitations to all the functions; and the State Ball, too. By the way, is it too much to expect that you have any lady you would care to invite? We are always short at these affairs — our own womenfolk can't come en masse. We are unfortunately still too conservative for that."

A plan formed rapidly in Hugh's mind: he would ask for a card for Alie; he could have her to himself for an evening; she would know no one, neither would he —

"Well, as a matter of fact," he said, "I do know one girl — "

"Oh, splendid! Give me her name and I 'll see she gets an invitation. That is splendid!"

Hugh gave Alie's name.

"Miss Cross from Ramapet," said the Diwan thoughtfully. "Let me see — Miss Cross." He frowned a little. "Of course, I don't want to be impertinent, Mr. Ranken, and of course anyone you have in mind is bound to be all right; but, you see, this is a big function, with His Highness there in person, and His Excellency the Governor — one has to be very particular. I know by name some Crosses in Ramapet — I should not care to have them here. Of course this Miss Cross is — well, what one might call presentable?"

"Of course," said Hugh, nettled at the question. Of course Alie was presentable — and with him, too — He must see Alie — have her alone.

"Oh, of course, Mr. Ranken," said the Diwan; but in his mind he was doubtful. He hoped that this might be quite another Cross — and he wished he had not brought up the matter.

In the car again Hugh's plan took shape. He knew enough of the easy hospitality in India to know that he could ask the Huskissons to ask Alie for the night — if they could not have her, something else could be arranged. A little chill of doubt entered his mind as to whether he might not be committing a solecism which would offend the social canons, but he would have to ask now. And in any case this was Alie, his Alie, and it was bound to be all right.

"Of course," said Mrs. Huskisson when he asked

her. She was not surprised at the request, but she too knew vaguely of Albert Edward Cross, the Eurasian leader in Madras. She spoke to her husband, who whistled.

"Cross?" he said. "Good Lord! I should have thought Ranken would have had more sense. But I don't see that we can get out of it now. I suppose he met her on the boat or somewhere out of her environment and knows nothing of her family."

"I hope he 's not going to do anything silly," said Mrs. Huskisson. "I think I 'll write to Mrs. McKenzie — "

CHAPTER XIX

ALIE arrived in Melur on the evening of the State Ball. Hugh, as a matter of fact, did not see her. He was to go to the banquet given by the Maharajah, to which only the very chosen few had been invited. Colonel Huskisson worked the invitation for him and it was a chance not to be missed.

Hugh went into his room to dress. From his window he could watch the golden shadows of the sunset. He looked across red tillage, yellow paddy land, and tangled jungle to the deep smoky blue of the Melur Hills fading into the peaks of the Nilgiris, now dim in the twilight. He might guess that from the highest of those peaks a man on a clear day in the rains could look across the flat lands of Southern India laid out checkerboard fashion at his feet and see a shining streak like the blade of a sword laid across the horizon which would be the bright waves of the Indian Ocean. He could see it for a moment before it would be blotted out by the deep purple shadow of the next rainstorm.

Hugh saw the dark hog's back of the hill behind Melur City, and as he watched the gathering shadows the hill was suddenly picked out in points of light. He stood wondering. Of course — the Maharajah's birthday! It depressed him a little that the state of

Melur could spend money to light a whole hillside a couple of miles long with electricity to shine on the squalidity of the city, lit with no better than smoking oil.

Hugh was slipping into his shirt when he heard the car returning with Alie from the station. He heard it stop under the porch and he saw the lights back away — to stand in readiness to take them to the palace. Hugh hurried with his dressing, hoping if possible to see Alie before she was turned over to Mrs. Huskisson's ayah and a bath. By the time he was ready Alie had disappeared. He wondered where she had gone to dress in that big house — he wanted badly to see her, to tell her he did not quite know what. He lit a cigarette and almost immediately pressed it out in an ash tray. He found that his fingers were trembling ever so slightly as he fastened the bar that carried his row of miniature medals on the lapel of his coat.

Alie, he knew, was to dine alone, for the Colonel and Mrs. Huskisson would be at the banquet. Later friends were to call for Alie and take her to the Durbar Hall for the ball. Hugh paced nervously across the hall. He wanted just to see Alie and to feel the warmth of her hand in his. He was glad Alie had come — happy that he was to see her. He was glad, and it did not occur to him that he had done anything out of the ordinary in asking Mrs. Huskisson to send her an invitation. True, he had noticed that the Colonel had not seemed eager.

Hugh knew that everything was going to be all right — although what could not be right he could not

specify. He wanted Alie — and Alie had come. He did not realize that he had forgotten much of her — that even a few weeks had softened a ragged outline.

He sat at the big writing table and scribbled a note. "Alie dearest: Sorry I did not see you. So glad you have come — till to-night — love — H. R."

He called the butler.

"Give this to the Missy Sahib," he said.

"Very good, sir," replied the Madrasi, who inwardly shrugged his shoulders and wondered what the world was coming to when people like that were called Missy Sahib. Things never used to be like that. He stood aside from the doorway to allow the Colonel and his wife to pass.

The Colonel was fingering his tie nervously. It would get pushed out of place by the Star of India that by sheer weight of metal exposed his stud. He loathed it. He settled his cuffs. His spurs clinked as he crossed the room. He hated mess jacket and tight overalls. He had been in a cavalry regiment before he joined the Political, and he wore those curiously colored strapped trousers of a shade of red which had earned for his regiment the nickname of the "Cherry Bims." His wife hated his mess uniform too, because the color went with nothing that anyone could wear.

The Colonel felt in his breast pocket to see that he had everything — white gloves, handkerchief, cigarette case.

"Well, Ranken. Ready? That 's good," he said. "Let 's have the car. Well, I hear the young lady has arrived — that 's good."

He was determined to see this thing through. He and his wife had thrashed it out, but all the same it was a damned silly thing for a fellow like Ranken to do. He should have known better. It put them in an awkward position, and if the Maharajah happened to take offense he would be involved in it. Residents have to be more careful than anyone else and it was damned annoying. After all, it was the Maharajah's state and his confounded ball. He had every right to be upset if he wanted to be. He 'd have to ask the child to dance and he only hoped that she was not as bad as she sounded. He had met her father. Kathlyn seemed a bit doubtful.

"Yes, she 's come all right, Hugh," Mrs. Huskisson was saying. "I think she 's very sweet and pretty. I think it was awfully nice of you to think of asking her." Mrs. Huskisson too was determined to see it through. She had gone to some pains to meet Alie on her arrival. Any man would think her attractive, she commented mentally. At least her clothes were possible, even if a little exaggerated. She was relieved. She had expected someone more obviously of the country, wearing pinks too pink. Things would turn out all right. At least, she hoped they would. Looking at Hugh, she could not believe that what Mrs. McKenzie said was true — that he was in love with Alie. Alie was pretty, of course, but Hugh could not be such an idiot as all that. She searched his face for an answer.

"It was awfully nice of you to ask her here," said Hugh. "I 'm really very grateful, Mrs. Huskisson."

He found the words hard to say.

Mrs. Huskisson liked Hugh. She found much that was attractive in him. She hoped that everything would turn out all right. She wished that she could speak to him, but she would not know what to say. Such things were better left alone. But she was afraid, and like her husband she was annoyed that she should have been put in this position — at the State Ball, too. There was no one of the officials at Melur who would not know what Alie was. Indians realized the difference of race so much more readily than ourselves. Hugh ought to have known better — but then, how could he? People in England don't realize.

"Come on, Kathlyn, let 's. go. The car 's here. Get in first, Ranken." Colonel Huskisson looked nervously at his watch.

Alie, dressing in her room, heard the car drive off. She fingered the peach-colored chiffon frock on the bed. What fun! It was bound to be a good dance.

There was a knock at the door and Mrs. Huskisson's ayah handed Hugh's note to her. She read it, crumpled it into a little ball, and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

"Oh, only Hugh," she said, and went on with her dressing.

Hugh sat next to an Indian A.D.C. of the Maharajah. He was a relation, fairly close as relations go in India, and he talked to Hugh of tiger shooting in the jungle gorges of the foothills and of tracking the saddleback sheep high up on the bare slopes of the Nilgiris. No child's sport was this, for the saddleback

was as wary as any animal, and in a herd one of the old ewes was always on the lookout.

Hugh liked him and tried to draw him into deeper channels, but with little success. With polished manner and consummate tact he led Hugh back to stories of shooting in the mists over the seven-thousand-foot line where a man's wind must be in perfect order to stand the rarefied air of that height. At length Hugh let himself be carried along in the flow of his conversation. He did not want to talk himself. He preferred to think of Alie, to wonder how he should find her. He ate mechanically. He assumed that he would meet her dramatically — would come on her when they were alone. He would take both her hands in his and tell her how glad he was to see her. She would be laughing and glad to see him —

Hugh could look up the long table to where the Maharajah sat, clothed apparently in cloth of gold and jewels. He was an enlightened man of advanced ideas, but custom demanded that he should wear on his person wealth enough to show to the most casual observer the fatness and solvency of his treasury. On one side of him sat the Governor, in Court dress and buckled knee breeches, and on the other Her Excellency Lady Lochalsh, wearing clothes of such obvious antiquity and disregard for current style that only a truly great lady could manage them without loss of self-respect. She wore her grey hair piled high on her head in the style of early Edward. In it was the tiara composed of the famous Lochalsh diamonds, which by comparison with the Maharajah's splendor might have

been so much glass. Her bare shoulders and luscious fin-de-siècle curves were the objects of admiration of many of the Maharajah's staff, to whom womenfolk were domestic affairs — never mentioned to the stranger and always kept strictly "purdah."

The lights glittered on the scarlet of mess uniforms, the glancing scintillations of jewels, and the shimmer of silk. Ranged round the walls, troopers of the Melur State Lancers in scarlet and blue stood like statues, the gleaming points of the lances tipped with light.

Hugh's A.D.C. neighbor drained his champagne glass as Her Excellency graciously rose.

"I 've got to go," he said. "We parade in state to the Durbar Hall. You 'd better slip across now, or you 'll get caught up in all these businesses and you 'll see nothing. You 'll excuse me. I 'll see you later."

He swaggered off up the room so bright under the electric lights. Hugh stood for a moment before taking his chance to slip out into the cool blue darkness. Across the flickering lamps of the city the hog-backed hill was still outlined with lights that hung among the stars. Down in the palace garden the trees were hung with fairy lamps, blue and red and gold, — thirty thousand of them, someone had said, — tended by an army of men discreetly hidden among the bushes. The Durbar Hall with its floor of dark polished teak was lit as extravagantly as the banqueting room. A red carpet ran to the throne on a dais at one end. Here again were Lancers ranged against the wall

— impassive scarlet-clad statues of bronze, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, scarcely seeming even to breathe.

Here were those who had not been bidden to dine, the lesser folk, the arrival of whose cars made a constant commotion at the entrance. Hugh hunted for Alie, but could not find her. He stood against the wall and searched the moving crowds. He could pick out no one who even faintly suggested her. As he looked there was a twanging of trumpets outside that hushed the talk within — a fanfare that stirred the blood. From the darkness beyond, sprinkled with the twinkling points of many-colored lights, came the cheers of those folk so humble — the Maharajah's own subjects — that they had been bidden to nothing except the privilege of seeing from a distance. They cheered the portly glittering figure of their ruler as he walked delicately with mincing steps.

"*Maharajah sahib ki jai!*" The words lost themselves in the gathering volume of sound. "Long live our lord the Maharajah!"

The crowd of guests inside the ballroom parted against the walls, leaving the way clear. The procession led up the centre of the hall and the Maharajah took his seat on the gilded throne, supported to right hand and to left by the Governor and his wife. Outside in the darkness the murmur of cheering died away.

Hugh wondered where Alie could be — he wondered why she did not appear. He wanted to see her — to see her.

He was still searching the crowd eagerly when

menials none too cleanly clothed began to roll up and remove the red carpet. It was an anticlimax which he had not expected.

The band struck up. The Maharajah gave his arm to Lady Lochalsh and led the way to the centre of the room. The Governor led forth Mrs. Huskisson, and Hugh had hardly time to wonder what was to happen next when he found that most stately and dignified dance, the Lancers, forming up before his eyes. He saw the Maharajah's portly figure bend in a bow to Lady Lochalsh and saw her gracious curtsey. He almost forgot his anxiety to find Alie in his enjoyment of watching the Lancers danced in state.

And then he saw Alie. She was standing across the room from him, her lips parted in a smile and her eyes shining with excitement. With some disappointment he realized that she had not seen him. She was looking up at some man whose face was turned away from him, and she laughed at something he said. Hugh watched her, trying to catch her eye. He wondered whether he could not edge round the room to her, but he realized that he was boxed in a corner and while the dance lasted he could not reach her.

The lean figure of the Governor, his white-silk calves flashing, — how hard Court dress was on His Excellency, — was whisking Mrs. Huskisson round.

> For he's going to marry Yum-Yum —
> Yum-Yum!
> Your anger pray bury,

For all will be merry;
I think you had better succumb —
cumb-cumb!

The band was hammering out the Mikado Lancers.

There seemed to be something familiar about the man to whom Alie was talking. Hugh looked at him hard. He had failed so far to catch Alie's eye, and now he searched his memory for that tall square-shouldered back. He knew him, and he felt that he could tell who it was if only he turned his head. The man did so. It was Lamont.

Lamont. Hugh wondered how on earth he had managed to be there. Lamont. He felt suddenly disappointed. Why should Lamont turn up here, of all places? He did not want to have to compete with Lamont, who after all was only a Eurasian subordinate in some firm in Bombay.

On this subject we pray you be dumb —
dumb-dumb,

hammered the band — the British Infantry band brought from Bangalore for the occasion.

Hugh tried again to catch Alie's eye. Somehow this did not seem to be the Alie he had expected to meet. He wished — he did not know quite what he wished. As he stared across the room Alie caught his eye. She recognized him and smiled and pointed him out to Lamont. Hugh smiled back what he was afraid was not much better than a rather sickly grin. Lamont waved a white-gloved hand.

The dance was coming to an end and the great ones dancing by invitation to open the ball in a seemly manner were still stepping blithely. The Maharajah's less advanced advisers watched with well-concealed amazement His Highness's undignified antics. Her Excellency did not look that sort of loose woman even in spite of her bare shoulders and her dress which showed the beginning of the division of her bosom — and yet how could she allow herself to be handled like that, or His Excellency permit it? They assumed that it was all right, but, frankly bored, they concealed their after-dinner belches as best they could.

Hugh took his eyes off Alie and wished he were anywhere but here. Even Alie — why on earth should she like to have such awful men round her? And why was her frock a little different — somehow in not quite good taste?

You 'll find there are many
Who 'll wed for a penny —

The music ended, and Hugh, more depressed than ever, waited for the State Lancers to lead off the floor before shouldering his way towards Alie — and Lamont.

CHAPTER XX

Colonel Huskisson managed to get his wife alone for a word between dances. Outside in the blue velvety darkness the fairy lamps glowed in the black outline of trees like marvelous fruit. From the verandah came the low murmur of voices. The polished expanse of ballroom floor was empty for the moment and through an archway they could see the long buffet blue with clouds of wreathing tobacco smoke.

Colonel Huskisson had just seen to it that His Excellency should have a chance to talk alone with the Diwan and the Maharajah — he would allow them a few moments and then he would rejoin them. There was a question or two which could best be settled by a word of private talk while the band moaned out dance music among the trees and men smoked the Maharajah's cigarettes and drank his champagne.

Colonel Huskisson, standing by a pillar, saw his wife cross the ballroom. He signaled to her with his eyebrows.

"Excuse me a moment," she said to her partner, slipping her fingers from his coat sleeve. She moved across the floor graciously and smoothly.

"How are things going, Kathlyn?" he asked. She knew what he meant.

"Oh, all right," she said rather doubtfully. "She 's

quite a nice little thing, really — and Hugh is not getting it all his own way. He 's had to do more than share her. I wonder why men — Anyway, Dick, it is n't as bad as I thought it would be." She laughed.

"That 's good, that 's good, Kathlyn. Have n't had to dance with her myself — but I must say I am glad it 's all right. Ranken 's a fool to ask her."

"How are you going along with His Ex. and H.H.?" she asked. She knew what was in the wind.

"Oh, splendidly, splendidly!" Colonel Huskisson spoke vaguely, his eyes wandering round the room.

She knew that there would be something to hear — sometime; but Dick — one could n't get things out of Dick until he felt like it; then it would all come in a burst of confidences. Dear Dick —

"Yes, splendidly!" he went on. "Got to get back to 'em. By the way, who 's that funny-looking specimen — looks like a chi-chi — who 's sharing the honors with Ranken for the girl?"

"I don't know — I think he 's come from Ramapet too," she replied. "No one seems to know him."

"Well, funny-looking specimen to see at a show like this. It looks to me as if someone slipped up on an invitation there. Not the sort of person one would expect here — and the Diwan 's generally so careful. Well, got to get back. And, Kathlyn — I hope we shan't have any trouble with him; he looks as if he were getting pretty well sozzled." He glanced significantly towards the buffet before turning abruptly and walking with his nervous lilting step down the wide verandah.

Hugh, standing alone with his hands in his pockets, watched him go. He wished he had n't asked Alie — he wished he had n't even come. Mrs. Huskisson had said how nice Alie looked, but it had not made him feel any better.

Hugh sat down in a chair on the verandah and lit a cigarette. He wondered if he would not be happier if he just let things go — let Alie slide out of his life and stopped thinking of her. But one could not just let Alie go. She had a kind of vivid quality.

In the room behind him men were talking.

"Who 's that tall fellow who has been dancing with the chi-chi girl in pink?" someone asked. "He 's going to be a nuisance if someone does n't look out for him. He 's only just about able to stand. He 's filling up on champagne."

"I dunno. Don't ask me what his name is. But there 's a fellow called Ranken to whom he seems to be attached. Ranken seems to be all right, but how the devil the other fellow came here — The girl 's here with Ranken, I believe."

Hugh got up and walked out on the verandah. It was bad enough having Lamont there at all, but to be automatically linked to him was a little too much. He wondered how Lamont had managed to get in — he was sure he had not been asked. Lamont drunk or Lamont sober, he 'd clear the thing up. He was to dance the next with Alie.

He found Alie coming in from the garden alone. Her frock was crumpled and her hair hung over her face. She laughed excitedly when she saw Hugh.

"Hullo, Hugh," she said. "You 're next, are n't you? I won't be a minute. I 'll just run in and clean up a bit."

Hugh stopped her.

"Where 's Lamont?" he asked.

"Oh, Geoffrey? Oh, he 's somewhere down there in the garden," she replied. "I 'll be back in a moment."

"No, wait a minute, Alie," he said. "I want a word with you first — "

Alie stared at him. This seemed to be a new Hugh. He led her into the dark of the garden under the dim glow of the lights.

"Why, Hugh, what 's the matter?" she asked. The whining tone and the frightened note in her voice jarred on him.

"Look here, Alie, we 've got to have it out — how was it that Lamont got here? Was he invited?"

Alie tried to see the expression on Hugh's face. He saw hers upturned, pallid and scared in the dim light.

"Why — of course — Oh, Hugh, what 's the matter?" she asked. She put a hand on Hugh's arm and he shook it off.

"Was he invited, Alie?" he repeated.

"Why, no, not exactly — when my invitation came he insisted on coming with me. I tried to get him not to, but he would come, and he crashed in on my card. I did my best, Hugh, truly I did — you don't really mind much, do you?"

"Mind? Yes, of course I mind, Alie. I thought — Anyway, why on earth did you let him do it? He 's

making a disgrace of himself here. He 's as drunk as an owl. Where is he staying, anyway?"

"But, Hugh, he 's not really drunk — he 's only a little — oh, well — cheerful, and lots of boys are, you know, at dances. He 's not staying anywhere — he 's going back on the four o'clock mail in the morning," she replied, her voice trembling on the verge of tears.

"Oh, he is, is he? Well, but if he 's not staying anywhere here, where did he get dressed for this show?"

Alie was frankly crying. She dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

"Hugh, you 're not really very angry, are you? I let him come to the Huskissons' bungalow to get dressed. I thought you would n't mind."

"You what?" Hugh was past any wonder.

"It was all right — really it was. There was a spare room there, — a kind of dressing room, — and I thought — Oh, Hugh, please say it 's all right." Her voice trailed off to nothing.

"But, Alie, don't you see? Don't you see that you were a guest in the Huskissons' house?" He found himself almost pleading with her. "Don't you see you can't do that kind of thing? It is n't whether I mind. Goodness knows I don't care — about the other part. Anything you do is all right. But you can't do things like that."

He felt hurt beyond words. He went on: —

"Well, you 'd better go in and tidy up a bit — this is our dance. Wait for me in the ballroom, and I 'll try and find Lamont. He 's in the garden, is n't he? I 've got to get him out of here somehow."

Alie ran in up the verandah steps and under the lights. Hugh turned down the dimly lit paths. The band was playing again and he could see the dancers circling and weaving in and out among the pillars of the Durbar Hall. He ran down the path between the lights. Anger hot and raging filled him. Damn Lamont! Of course Alie asked him to come, even if she did try to pass the blame on to Lamont.

The path led him past the edge of the fairy lights into the warm darkness beyond. Finding Lamont was the only thing that mattered, and the darkness and the whipping branches, the very dust underfoot, served to clog his actions. It was like a nightmare in which everything lost its true proportions.

He realized that he had left the limits of the garden. The path had disappeared beneath his feet. He doubled back on his tracks. Lamont — he would find him and have it out with him. The night-flying moths brushed his face and a trickle of sweat ran down the back of his neck. His collar had gone soft and limp. It was too warm for this kind of thing and his anger evaporated. What did it matter? It was the most preposterous situation, really, and all through his own fault. There was no one he could blame besides himself. He had engineered it all himself and he must get that fellow Lamont out of it. It was just the kind of thing one would expect of him.

He got back to the lighted verandah and the band playing in the darkness. He went up the steps. Lamont must surely have gone in, and if he was outside there was not much harm done.

As he mounted the verandah steps Colonel Huskisson called to him.

"Oh, Ranken, you 're the man I want — you 'd better come and help me see to the removal of that friend of yours. He 's just made a real fool of himself."

"What 's he done now?" asked Hugh, too weary of the whole ghastly incident to worry much about his "friend."

"Well, apparently one of the Maharajah's A.D.C.'s was told off to ask if he was invited and how he had got in. They had a first-class row and they had to be separated. I think I can pacify the A.D.C., but there 'll be a hell of a noise about it if the Maharajah comes to hear of it. You 'd better see if you can't get him out quietly — he 's in the bar now."

"Oh, damn!" said Hugh. "You know, he 's no friend of mine — I did n't bring him; but I 'll see what I can do — "

"You 'd better," said the Colonel. "I 've got to go back. H. E. 's having a chat with the Maharajah."

In the buffet, which was fortunately deserted, Hugh found Lamont, flushed and disheveled.

"Look here, Lamont," he said, "you 'd better get out of this as quietly as you can. You 've made quite enough trouble for one evening — "

"That 's all right, Ranken, old boy — that 's all right," Lamont replied, speaking with cautious deliberation.

"Shut up!" Hugh replied shortly. "You force yourself in here and then you don't even know how to

behave. You 'd better go and get your hat and coat and go. I 'm going to see you out of this."

" 'Force myself in.' That 's good. As if Alie, dear little Alie, did n't beg me to come! That 's good," Lamont replied. "Just because I cut you out with your girl you think you can turn me out. Well, I tell you, Ranken, you can't get rid of me like this."

"Hurry up," said Hugh. "I 'll give you a minute — "

"And then what?" Lamont asked belligerently. "I suppose you think you can throw me out. I tell you, Ranken, it would take four of you to do it."

"Lamont," said Hugh, "I 'm tired of you. Leave Alie out of it. You get your things and go."

He spoke, trying to control himself as he knew he must.

They stood facing each other. Hugh tried to command him with his eyes.

"Now then," he said, "your minute 's up — are you going to go?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Lamont said. Then he broke out furiously, "If I was n't only a chi-chi you would n't dare talk to me like this; but it 's always the same — you think you are so good just because — "

"Oh, go on and get out," said Hugh, hating the whining tone. Lamont went towards the door. He turned just before he reached it. "It 's all very well, Ranken," he said, "but, anyway, you think you have Alie. Well, I tell you you have n't. She 's mine now. At least you 've been cut out by a chi-chi — "

"Shut up, will you!" said Hugh. "And at least

have the decency to leave Alie out of it. Go and get your things and go."

He saw Lamont into the cloakroom to get his coat. As he waited for him he saw his reflection in the glass. He was pale and the sweat was running down his cheeks. He found his hand shaking as he felt for a handkerchief.

"Oh, hell!" said Hugh.

He put Lamont into the Huskissons' car and told the man to take him to the station — anywhere away from the Durbar Hall. They exchanged no word.

Hugh went back and washed his face and hands. He dipped his wrists in the cool water and felt revived. He was very tired. As he dried his hands he remembered Alie and went in search of her, but she was nowhere to be found. He hunted through the crowded ballroom and the long verandah. No one seemed to know where she was. He returned to the door and asked a servant, a magnificent person in scarlet and gold, if he had seen her.

The Missy Sahib had gone, he was told — gone some time ago.

"Gone?" said Hugh.

He stood uncertainly, wondering what he should do. He felt a great relief. He was in no mood to meet her just then. She had let him in for nothing but unpleasantness that evening. It was the best thing she could do in the circumstances. Well, he could see her in the morning.

Hugh slept soundly and late. He awoke with a

feeling that he had smoked too many cigarettes. He lay in bed and looked dismally at the world through the haze of his mosquito net. It gave everything, even his thoughts, an indefinite woolly outline. He tried to concentrate his thoughts.

The best thing he could do was to leave the Huskissons as gracefully as possible. He certainly could not stay after the events of the night before; nor would they want to keep him.

And Alie? He wondered if he had not been rude and overharsh to her—but he could not escape the memory of her glittering eyes on her flushed return from the darkness of the garden, nor Lamont's remark, "She 's mine now."

He looked unhappily out at the bedroom seen through the netting. He had better take Alie to Ramapet — and leave her there.

Someone knocked at the door. It was Colonel Huskisson, booted and spurred.

"Hullo, Ranken," he said. "You awake? I say, what 's happened to that girl? Kathlyn's ayah says that she is n't in her room — in fact, that she only came here last night to put up her things. She took 'em and cleared out."

Hugh threw back the mosquito curtain.

"Do you mean to say she 's not here?" he asked, amazed.

"Well, it looks like it. She 's just plain gone."

There was a pause.

"Colonel," said Hugh, "I suppose you know that she brought that fellow Lamont here to dress?"

"Yes, I know," Huskisson replied, "I know — but anyway, Kathlyn does n't — " He looked out of the window and tapped his boot impatiently with his riding whip.

"I wanted to apologize for that. I did n't know about it till the affair last night."

"That 's all right, Ranken — that 's all right. It 's a pity it all happened. What are your plans now?"

"Well, I 'm — Look here, Colonel, I meant to tell you — I forgot to tell you — I am due in Madras to-morrow night. I think I 'll take the mail, if you don't mind — " He broke off uncomfortably.

"Sure you can't stay?" was the reply, but it lacked cordiality. "Well, if you must — "

"Yes, I 'm afraid I must," Hugh said.

"Well, you can go by the five o'clock to-morrow morning, if you must — "

"I think I will," Hugh replied — thank heaven he had got that over, anyway.

"Well, I 'm sorry. By the way, breakfast when you like, Ranken. I 've got to go to work. So long." The Colonel left Hugh standing in his pyjamas in the middle of the room.

What on earth had possessed Alie to clear out like that — without a word? Possibly he had said too much — he must have done. He wondered what he should do. He went into the bathroom to take a shower.

Under the cool of the water reason came to him and he decided what to do. He must go to Ramapet to make an apology — to put things right. It was the

only decent thing to do. He mentally concocted a telegram to the McKenzies. They would put him up for the night. But it was a miserable end to the Melur visit which had promised so well.

CHAPTER XXI

Mrs. McKenzie sat knitting in the drawing-room of her house in Ramapet. She had a book propped on the table beside her, but she was not reading. She sat under a big brass standing lamp which threw its light on to her work. The rest of the room was in darkness. She had her feet in a pillowcase to keep off the mosquitoes.

The hall and drawing-room were nominally two rooms, but they were in actual fact one, divided by a big arch to allow free circulation of air in the hot weather. On the other side of the hall, through the open study door, she could see her husband working at his desk under a green-shaded lamp. He was trying to pick up arrears of work which had accumulated during his absence from Ramapet in camp touring his district.

McKenzie was one of the old style of Indian Civilian who thought it necessary to keep in close personal touch with the people under him and who felt it his duty to know the headman of every village and township. He viewed with open disfavor the increase in paper work of late years and what he regarded as the incursions of the Secretariat into his business. Nowadays, dismayed on each return to headquarters by the

masses of files awaiting him, he was able to get out to "his" people with decreasing frequency.

Mrs. McKenzie put her knitting on her lap and watched for some sign of slackened concentration in the figure of her husband, writing, writing, writing under his green-shaded lamp.

He leaned back and filled his pipe.

"Jo, are you busy?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied uncompromisingly, and began to untie the pink tape which bound the file next for execution from the basket beside him.

"Jo, please come here. I want to talk to you."

McKenzie put back the file and came into the drawing-room. He paused to light his pipe and sat on the round reed stool on which his wife had been resting her feet.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"Jo, do you think we had better tell him anything?"

"Tell who what?" John asked in surprise. His mind was still running on the matters of which he had been writing.

"Why, tell Hugh about Alie Cross, of course. He 's coming here to-morrow, and he 's coming here to see her."

"Ranken coming here to see Alie Cross? Oh, nonsense!"

"It 's not nonsense," she answered. "Why, of course he 's coming here to see her. Don't you remember how he was always with her on the boat coming out and what Mrs. Huskisson wrote?"

John McKenzie dug at the bowl of his pipe with a

knitting needle which he picked up out of his wife's basket.

"But what do you propose to tell him?" he asked as he finished his excavation and wiped the needle on his socks before returning it.

"Oh, I don't know — tell him what Alie is like, what her father is like, and — and her grandmother, and that poor old great-aunt. Why, it would ruin him if he were to marry Alie, and he could never be really happy with her. Just think — he does n't even know, probably, that if he married her he would marry the whole family."

"But why should you even think that he wants to marry her?" he asked.

"Oh, Jo, don't be silly. Anyone could see there was something there."

"Well, I confess I can't see it myself. The trouble with you is you always want to fix up things between people."

"Well, why should he want to come to Ramapet?" she asked. "It is n't as if there was anything to see or do here. Why, it 's right off the beaten track."

"Oh, I don't know. There 's nothing wrong with Ramapet. Anyway, why should n't he come here? I suppose it never occurs to you that he might want to see us again. And you forget that he 's out here on a kind of educational tour with an eye to the future. I can show him all kinds of things he can't see so well with anyone else! I can take him out to see village life at first hand. Oh, and I can take him round the jail. He probably has n't had a chance to see a jail

anywhere else. Why, coming here would be wonderful for him! Besides, he 's probably fed up with hotels and trains and *dak* bungalows and wants to have a decent meal and a little peace."

"Oh, Jo, you are silly sometimes. Of course he does n't want to see us, and he does n't have to come this far to see a village or a jail. But just supposing he did want to marry Alie?"

McKenzie laughed.

"Well, supposing he did? Let 's just assume for a moment that he has come to see Alie. Ranken 's a damn sensible sort of fellow, and no one could even imagine him getting so enthusiastic over anyone as to kick over the traces as far as his affections are concerned."

"But he may not be able to help it," Mrs. McKenzie said. "He 's so nice and so loyal — "

"Yes, Ranken 's all right; but even assuming that he did think her attractive — let him get one good look at her now and that family of hers and you 'll find him making tracks for some light-skinned, golden-haired charmer with a good conventional background."

"Well, I hope you are right," said Mrs. McKenzie doubtfully.

"Of course I 'm right. Alie Cross is the completest case of reversion to type I have ever seen. Why, you would think she had never been out of Ramapet — she is so eager to drag her experiences in. The place and her family have absorbed her."

"But Hugh was so nice to her on the boat. I am sure you had better let me just drop a hint to him."

"Look here, darling. You just leave Ranken alone. He 's all right, and he knows what he 's doing. Just say nothing. Anyone might have been attracted to Alie in England. She is a most personable young thing. Hugh probably could n't help himself, any more than a nightingale can help singing. He does n't sing because he wants to — it 's only excess of hormones, or something or other, and it was probably the same with Hugh, too."

"Well, you would n't say anything, then, Jo?"

"No, darling, I can't say I would. I thought I had made myself clear. Is n't it about your bedtime? I 've got a whole lot of things to get through."

"You won't be long, will you, Jo?"

"No, I won't be long — and don't bother your head about Ranken, will you?"

"No. Good night, Jo darling."

John McKenzie went back to his green-shaded light.

CHAPTER XXII

SEATED in the train for Ramapet, Hugh looked out of the window and wondered why he had come so far. He watched go by a much more Indian India than he had become accustomed to see in the North. Here was the India of *Little Henry and His Bearer,* of Little Black Mingo and the Dhobi's Donkey. It was the kind of India he had always imagined — with palm-tree groves and funny flat-topped hills.

With something of a shock it came to Hugh that he might be bored. He felt tired, and this Indian jaunt had become something of a burden. What he really wanted was to return home to regular work and lights on wet streets, to warm dark rooms and firelight gleaming on silver, to Rumbold and Phyllis — Phyllis who fitted in so well with all his thoughts.

For some reason the memory of Phyllis on the day of their last hunt surged back into his mind. What a dumb idiotic fool he was!

The train clacked over the points into Ramapet Station and without difficulty he found the man McKenzie had sent to meet his train. He lay back in the car, glad to be in the open air. He wanted nothing but a bath and breakfast. He was thoroughly tired of travel, tired of hotels and continually moving to satisfy conscience.

At breakfast he announced his intention of going to pay a call on Alie.

"Well, you 'd better take the car," McKenzie said, avoiding his wife's eye, which, as he guessed, was giving him a meaning glance. "Take the car — neither of us will be using it this morning. No, that 's all right — you take it. The man knows the way, and you probably would never find it if you had to explain to a taxi driver."

Bathed, and breakfasted, luxuriating in clean linen and a newly washed suit, Hugh found himself on his way to Alie's home.

As he was driven over the wide shady roads Hugh looked with interest at every bungalow and compound, wondering which would prove to be Alie's. One looked too spacious and well-cared-for, another too untidy, to attach to her. Unexpectedly the car turned in at a gate. In a way it was what he had least expected, but on the whole not different.

Hugh looked with curiosity at the bare expanse of compound with a few untidy plants in pots. The gardener's son, a naked pot-bellied baby with a piece of string and a silver amulet round his waist, was whisked out of sight by the gardener's wife.

Under the porch the car stopped and Hugh got out. He went up the steps and shouted.

"*Koi hai?*" — "Is anyone there?" — the usual way of bringing a servant in India. He had never learned to announce his presence without embarrassment in this bell-less land. Despite usage, it hardly seemed the thing to stand shouting on someone else's doorstep.

After an interval, Sam, in grimy shirt sleeves and khaki trousers, answered his call. As he came, his bare feet ticking on the ragged split bamboo matting, he settled his turban firmly on his head.

"Is Miss Cross in?" Hugh asked in his careful Hindustani dutifully and painstakingly learned. Sam preceded Hugh into the big dark living room.

He would call someone, he said as he went out, leaving Hugh seated on the edge of a hard chair. From an inner room he heard Sam's rush of Tamil and the voice of a woman in reply. It certainly was not Alie. He heard the sounds of conversation, of rustlings and movement, from the other room.

Hat in hand, Hugh waited. He took out and filled his pipe and replaced it in his pocket. On the verandah Sam had found excuse for stopping work and was deep in conversation with McKenzie's immaculate white-clad chauffeur. The murmur of their voices came through the open archway of the door.

Hugh looked round the room. The disconnected items of furniture, related only in their gloom and heaviness, depressed him. His eye tried to follow and was lost in the dust-filled intricacies of the carving of a marble-topped side table. His eye lingered for a moment on an elaborate model of the Taj Mahal under a glass cover, and was finally held fascinated by a rakish blue-silk bow tied to the leg of a frivolous milk-maid stool, the top of which was decorated in poker work.

Hugh heard footsteps on the matting. He rose. It was Louisa shuffling in in her felt slippers.

Hugh had expected Alie.

"I beg your pardon. My name is Ranken. I came to see Miss Cross," he said to the fat old woman, whose unwinking eyes held him in an uncompromising stare. Louisa shuffled on without a word and dropped into her chair by the marble-topped table.

Hugh felt uncomfortable and wondered if he had been heard.

"I beg your pardon," he repeated. "I am Mr. Ranken. I came to call on Miss Cross."

"Alie is not in," said Louisa.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Hugh, somewhat disconcerted. "Can you tell me where I can find her?"

"I don't know," Louisa replied.

"Well, I have come a long way to see her, and I thought perhaps you might be able to tell me — "

"I am Alie's grandmother," Louisa said, "and I cannot tell when she will be here."

Hugh felt embarrassed. Louisa's manner was cold and hostile.

"Alie is busy now," went on Louisa. "I do not know when she will see you."

"You mean to say that she does not want to see me?" said Hugh, surprised but determined.

"No, I do not mean she does not wish to see you," Louisa replied. "I cannot tell what that girl wants. I mean I do not wish you to see her."

Hugh was amazed.

"But why? I don't understand. Why should you wish to prevent me seeing her?" he asked.

Louisa leaned forward, a curiously imposing figure in her rusty black.

"When Alie was a babee her mother sent her home, to England, to school," Louisa replied, choosing her words carefully. "I did not want like that. I wanted her here to be like our girls are. I said, 'You can't make her like what she is n't, is n't it? She will come back and she will look at me and say, "Ohe, Grandma is only a nasty old chi-chi woman. She is black!" She will say, "Papa is only a *hubshi* — a nigger." '

" 'Why because you send her like that, Evie?' I said. 'She will not want to live in Ramapet.' Her mother disobeyed me, her husband's mother, and sent her. 'She will want to marry a European gentleman,' I said, 'the same like what your sister and brother did. She will not live in Ramapet.'

"Well, her mother died and I ordered her: 'Come back,' I said — and she has come.

"She is a lucky girl. For a week, or fourteen days, maybe a month, she said, 'We did not do like this at home. We had such a thing in England.' I kept *chup* and said nothing.

"Now she is one of our people again. She is home in Ramapet, and she will marry and have babees, and they will be our people."

"Well," said Hugh, "I only wanted to see her, Mrs. Cross. I met her in England, and I don't know that it will do her much harm to see me."

"I tell you she cannot see you. When she sees you she will say, 'Here is England again. I don't want all these nasty Eurasian folks. I will go home and be a

burra mem-sahib.' She will say, 'Yes,' when you ask her, 'Please to marry me.' "

Hugh laughed. "But I don't want to marry her. I am not going to ask her."

"Well, why because you come so far to see her? Or maybe you think she is a nottee girl and you can put her in trouble. If you do, I will make you marry her before she is four months gone. My old woman's eyes will see."

"Oh, come, Mrs. Cross! There is nothing of that kind," Hugh replied uncomfortably. "I only want to see her."

"Well, I say you can't, mister. Alie is a good girl, and you can't," she said vehemently.

"Well, Mrs. Cross, I am sorry you take this attitude. I assure you I want no more than to see Alie, but if you definitely do not wish me to see her there is nothing more to be said. I had better say good-bye." He took up his hat.

As he was crossing the verandah to the car he met Albert Edward coming up the steps.

"I am Mr. Cross," he said. "Have you come to see me?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, Mr. Cross, I came to see Alie," Hugh replied, "but — "

"But Alie is out," interrupted Louisa. She had come out on to the verandah as soon as she heard her son's voice.

"Well, you must come soon to see her, when she is in," said Albert Edward cordially. "Where are you in Ramapet?"

"I am staying with Mr. McKenzie. You see, I met your daughter in England, and we were on the same ship coming out. My name is Ranken."

"Oh, and so you are staying with my friend McKenzie! And you came out in the same ship with my little Alie!" Albert Edward rubbed his fat little hands together. "You will come some other time to see her?"

To Albert Edward's mind there could be no doubt as to the reason for this call. His little Alie — maybe they would get married. Albert Edward warmed to the thought. They would get married, and Alie, great-granddaughter of Colonel Cross, would be a burra mem-sahib. Maybe she would go to England and —

"*Chup,* Albert!" said Louisa, breaking in. "Shut up, Albert — he cannot stay to see our Alie."

"But why can he not see our little Alie if he has come so far?" Albert asked, surprised.

Hugh, thoroughly embarrassed, felt that all he wanted was to get away from Louisa and Louisa's influence.

"No, I 'm sorry I cannot see Alie. I can't wait. Perhaps I shall see her some other time. Some other time, perhaps — at least, I hope so, I 'm sure. Good-bye, Mr. Cross. Perhaps I shall see you and Alie at the Club to-night. Good-bye. Good-bye, Mrs. Cross." And Hugh, thankful to be out of it, got into the car.

Albert Edward watched the car leave the compound and turned to follow Louisa into the living room.

"I will go to the Club to-night and see that gentleman, and he will come home with me to-night for supper," he said.

"I will not have him here, Albert Edward," Louisa replied.

"But why, if he wants to see Alie? He has come far to see her, and he will ask her to marry him. Why because you say you will not have him here to see Alie?"

"Because I say he is not to," said Louisa.

It was not often that she used that direct form of speech, and Albert Edward, forgetting the force behind it, was encouraged to pursue the matter.

"Of course he will see Alie. Alie will want to see him. And maybe he has come to say that he wants to marry our Alie, is n't it?" Albert Edward persisted.

"No, he does not want to marry Alie," said Louisa. "He is a burra sahib, and Alie is only a chi-chi. Do you think he has come to marry Alie? Oh, Albert Edward, you are one big fool. You never do *malum* anything ever. He marry Alie? He will try to seduce her, maybe, and then he will run off and marry a burra mem-sahib. Oh, you Albert Edward — "

"Mother! *Ahisti, ahisti!* He is a gentleman."

"*Ahisti, ahisti!*" Louisa mimicked. "You will think it fine when she is four months gone. Anyway, Albert Edward, she will not marry him or be his woman. Our Alie is going to marry another man. In three months she will marry someone else. You will see."

Albert faced Louisa sitting in her characteristic pose. She held her son's eyes with her unwinking stare.

He passed his tongue over his lips. He could think of no one in Ramapet to whom he would wish to marry his daughter.

"But who is it that our Alie can marry? There is no one here that I would let her marry," he said. He went on as if speaking to himself, "I thought she might marry some European gentleman and go home. I thought maybe she might marry a gentleman like Mr. Ranken."

Louisa seemed to be engrossed in the garden and the attempts of the mali's naked baby to pick up the head of a marigold from the dust without toppling over. Her expression remained unmoved, but behind her hard eyes her brain worked at racing speed. She, too, checked off the possibles and probables for Alie.

She turned to Albert Edward.

"Alie is going to marry such a man as that Lamont. He is our kind. It would be to my wishes if she married such a man."

"That Lamont!" said Albert Edward, aghast. "Why, he is — his grandmother was a Madrasi sweeper woman, and his grandfather an engine driver on the railway! That Lamont — that Lamont marry my little Alie, whose great-grandfather was a colonel in the Army! You are one fool, Mother, to talk such things. Our Alie, whose grandfather was in the Imperial Police, and I am first-grade leading pleader in Ramapet and Member of Legislature and — "

"And our Alie whose great-grandfather kept a drink shop in Kamatipura in Bombay. Our Alie whose great-aunt is a dotty old chi-chi woman. Our Alie

whose grandmother is a Goanese. Oh, you Albert Edward — you are like your father. You *malum* nothing." Louisa laughed a hard croaking laugh.

"Why because you laugh?" asked Albert Edward, stung. "You would have our Alie marry that Lamont and live here forever and have black children. I have more than three lakhs of rupees. I will buy her one good European husband — "

"And you will give him money to pay his debts," Louisa interrupted, "and he will leave her with a baby and go back home. I want no more of your talk. Alie will marry that Lamont and he will be a husband like I want for her. That Lamont has a strong back and he will give her plenty children. When she has a big belly she will not want to go dancing like now. He will beat any man who comes near her, and if he wants other women he can have them. Alie will not have to go without. He has a strong back, that Lamont."

Albert Edward turned furiously on his mother.

"Lamont! That Lamont! Our Alie marry him! I will say, 'No.' She will not marry him. She will marry a European gentleman like that Ranken. I say she will. I will go to the Club to-night and I will have him here to see Alie. They will get married, and I will give him a big present when he does. You see."

"I will see, Albert Edward. Oh, you man — you are like your papa!" Louisa replied, as Albert Edward left the room.

She sat loose and sagging in her chair, and the corners of her mouth moved into a smile. She would see. So

she sat for an hour, until she was aroused by Agatha's plaintive cry from the next room.

"Louisa, Louisa. Come quick."

"Oh, *chup*, you nottee girl!" she answered, as she slowly raised herself to her feet.

CHAPTER XXIII

HUGH felt much as a small animal might feel after escaping from being quarreled over by two crows. He experienced intense relief as he was driven back to the McKenzies' bungalow in the McKenzies' car. Even the warm dusty air of Ramapet seemed fresh and wholesome after his encounter with Louisa. He drew a long breath. He was thankful to have escaped the embarrassment of Louisa's words and to have been spared any further conversation with Albert Edward.

Marry Alie! What a suggestion! Alie the gamin, Alie the — well, no matter. Hugh could hardly bring himself to believe that he had even taken Alie to a concert, to dance at the Savoy — much less to Rumbold for his last week there. As for the Huskissons —

He felt as if he had wakened from a bad dream; but the dream persisted in following him into real life. He had come to Ramapet to purge his system of Alie, to round off in a conventional way that episode in his life. Yet here was the episode refusing to be rounded off. In some obscure way he even felt responsible for Alie's future now that he had seen her appalling grandmother, the horrible house, her impossible father. What a mess it was! He supposed he would have to make some effort to see her.

McKenzie was giving orders to the gardener as the

car arrived. He turned to Hugh. "Do you know anything about chrysanthemums?" he asked. "I can't get mine to flower like the ones in the Police Mess compound, and I was just holding a council of war over these miserable specimens. Do you know anything about them?"

"I can't say I do," Hugh replied. "I like them, and we have a whole lot at home, — that is, at Rumbold, — but I don't know much about gardens."

"Oh, that 's a pity," McKenzie said. "By the way, what sort of morning did you have?"

"All right," said Hugh, "but I did n't see Alie Cross."

"Did you see any of the others — did you see Mrs. Cross?"

"Yes, I did," said Hugh, laughing a little ruefully. "She 's about all I did see. As a matter of fact, I saw the old man for a moment, but Mrs. Cross shooed me out and would hardly let me say a word to him."

"Well, that 's funny, because generally the old lady is inclined to keep in the background. And you did n't see Alie either?"

"No," said Hugh.

"Well," McKenzie went on, "I wish you had seen her in her own surroundings. She 's changed, you know. She 's reverted to type, and she makes quite an interesting ethnological study. In fact, you would hardly know that she had ever been away. If you 'll excuse me a minute, I must go and talk to the syce before tiffin. Tell my wife, will you? You go on in, and don't forget we are going down to the jail this afternoon."

In the hall Hugh met Mrs. McKenzie.

"Did you see Alie?" she asked.

"No, I did n't. She was n't in. Your husband asked me to tell you that he has just gone down to talk to the syce."

"Well, I expect they told you that Alie has made quite a hit with a black-and-tan Eurasian who has arrived from Bombay. They are said to be engaged, and we 're all expecting to hear it officially any minute," said Mrs. McKenzie. She was not yet satisfied that Hugh was not still in Alie's train, and she watched his face closely. Hugh's obvious relief was the last thing she expected.

"Why, no," he said, "they did n't tell me that. I 'm awfully glad to hear it. You know," he went on, feeling acutely self-conscious, "the funny thing was that old Mrs. Cross seemed to be absolutely convinced that I had come to ask Alie to marry me." He laughed. "I must say it seemed pretty cool to me — and amazingly embarrassing."

Mrs. McKenzie stifled her impulse to reply, "But have n't you?" and said, "Well, I must say — And Alie just about as good as engaged!" She would make doubly sure that Hugh was impressed with the fact of Alie's engagement. "I suppose they all welcomed the idea and you were received with open arms. What a social catch you would be for a blacky-white chi-chi family, Hugh!"

"Well, you know," Hugh said, "they did n't — or, rather, Mrs. Cross did n't. She 's a sensible old thing, really. She 's absolutely determined that Alie should

marry here, and equally determined that I should n't see her."

"Good Lord!" said Mrs. McKenzie. As she spoke the butler announced luncheon.

"Well, I must go and wash," said Hugh.

"Umph!" was all McKenzie said when his wife told him. "Umph! Well, I must say, darling, I think the old lady 's wise — wiser than I thought."

"But Hugh, Jo! Just fancy turning down Hugh! Don't you see he 's a catch for any girl? The old lady must be mad!"

"Look here," her husband replied. "You 'd better be thankful things have turned out so well. I don't mind admitting now — Well, anyway, what about tiffin?"

In his room Hugh stood towel in hand. For the first time for months he was beginning to see clearly. He was like a man awakened from the fog of an anæsthetic.

Marry Alie!

It was a good thing she was going to marry and settle down here. Probably the best thing for her.

But marry Alie!

Why on earth had he come to Ramapet, or even to India?

"Good Lord!" he said aloud to himself in astonishment.

He saw everything so clearly now. He did n't want to educate himself conscientiously and laboriously. He did not want to see the Taj. Least of all did he

want to see the Ramapet villages or McKenzie's infernal jail.

He had no enthusiasm left. He seemed to have made a mess of things — to have taken them in the wrong order. He wanted Rumbold, the cold raw days of early spring, and Phyllis's companionship.

Hugh looked out of the window. A cart going by filled the air with groans from unoiled axles, the bullocks plodding noiselessly in the deep white dust by the roadside. Hugh leaned his head against the warm woodwork of the window. He felt sick with longing for Rumbold with Phyll in March, with white clouds racing overhead, and yellow crocuses. They could walk over soggy stubble and watch the lapwings throw aërial acrobatics in the ecstasy of spring, and here he was wasting time which ought to be spent with Phyll. But she probably did not want it. He would be too late.

Hugh turned slowly and picked up his coat. He would have to go down to tiffin and be polite. On his dressing table his red-bound guidebook lay open. Hugh snapped it shut and threw it in a drawer.

What was the good of it all?

Without warning, his new clarity of vision got the better of him. He was amazed at the simplicity of everything. Why not Rumbold anyhow? There was nothing, after all, to prevent him. In three weeks he could be home with Phyll, — of course, she would be just the same, — home where the winds bent the daffodils in April. Walking with Phyll. They could

come to India later if they wanted to, and he could show her the Ramapet jail.

"Good Lord!" said Hugh as he struggled hurriedly into his coat. He felt that he had not a moment to spare. He was going home — going home to Phyll. Hurry, hurry, or he 'd be too late.

"I am sorry, Mrs. McKenzie," he said at tiffin, "but I have got to leave for home on Saturday."

Mrs. McKenzie cast a meaning glance at her husband across the table.

As usual on all important occasions, he was avoiding her eye.